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THE IMPACT OF A 'BIG BROTHER': A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

by



Deborah Ann Kerr

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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Date *September 10, 1985*  
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#### DEDICATION

This is dedicated to those men who are a Big Brother to a boy, and who give so generously of themselves and their time.

### **Abstract**

The rising incidence of separation and divorce in recent years has increased the need for community resources and support for single-parent families. One such service is the Big Brothers program, which matches an adult male with a boy in a father-absent home. The major purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate the effects of a Big Brother on the family. When a Big Brother establishes a friendship relationship with a boy, what are the changes that occur within that child, other family members, and in the family as a whole? It was these changes, at both the individual and family level, that were the focus of this study.

To examine change, a pre-post format spanning a six-month study period was used. Four families, consisting of 13 individuals, participated in the study.

The study is primarily qualitative in nature, and descriptive data was obtained in personal and family interviews. The family interviews were videotaped and rated by two trained observers using the Family Rating Scale. In addition, some quantitative data was collected using the Bene-Anthony Family Relations Test and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventories. Research findings are presented in the form of four descriptive case-studies.

The involvement of a Big Brother was found to have a significant impact on the family, and this could be either positive or negative depending on such factors as the quality and consistency of the Big Brother-Little Brother relationship. At the individual level, the boy's perception of family relationships shifted considerably. In general, the boy's level of self-esteem was found to decrease and the mother's self-esteem increased. Some possible explanations for this are offered. The Big Brother relationship was experienced by the boys as a positive and giving one.

The importance of supporting and enhancing the Big Brother-Little Brother relationship was highlighted in this study. In this way, the potential for positive impacts for both the boy and his family can be promoted.

P

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## I. INTRODUCTION

As the rate of divorce continues to grow, it is becoming increasingly common that adults and their children will live for some period of time in a single-parent family. Currently in Canada, it has been estimated that two out of every five marriages will end in divorce (Government of Canada, 1981). In the City of Edmonton alone, there are approximately 17,400 families headed by one parent (Government of Canada, 1981). For the majority of these families, the parent remaining in the home will be the mother. Many (about 35%) of these families will be mother-headed due to a separation or divorce.

Divorce can be seen as a major life event or crisis, as significant in the lives of those it affects as the birth or death of a family member, or major illness. Research on divorce, as will be discussed in Chapter II, suggests that adjustment to divorce, and living in a one-parent family, is largely influenced by the ability of the participants to master the disruption, successfully negotiate the transition, and create a more gratifying family than was the previous one. The outcome depends not only on what has been lost, but on what has been created in the new family form (Wallerstein, 1980).

The difficulty, however, is that the needs of many one-parent families are great. This family form is considered by many researchers to be at risk, not due so much to father absence but to stresses and a lack of support systems resulting in changed family functioning for the single-parent and their children (Hetherington et al., 1979; Lynn, 1974; Anthony, 1974; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980). Having one adult-parent in the home carrying full responsibility for what has traditionally been handled by two, the single-parent family is prone to have deficits in its financial, emotional, and time resources.

It has generally been recognized that the community has a responsibility to offer support and resources, and this it does in a number of ways--financial assistance for full-time homemakers; provision of daycare for parents working outside the home; subsidized daycare for those earning low incomes; counselling services; and so on.

For the children growing up in one-parent families, the needs are also great. Not only do they have the typical needs of developing youth, but they also must somehow adjust to a major family crisis, negotiate new relationships with family members (particularly the non-custodial parent), and likely assume more responsibilities than are usually required of children living in two-parent families. These children's contact with the

non-custodial parent, usually the father, will range from on-going and rewarding, to irregular, rejecting, or non-existent. It is an unfortunate reality that for many young children, the latter is the case. Often, this is influenced by their parents' inability to establish or allow on-going contact with both parents (Wallerstein, 1980).

Most community services only indirectly benefit these children. In a study of single-parent families in the City of Edmonton, researchers identified the major problem for these children as the lack of involvement with the non-custodial parent. Associated with this lack of involvement was the subsequent lack of a role model; in most cases, a father or male model (Edmonton Social Services, 1975).

Community agencies have attempted to fill this need. The Big Brothers Program is one such agency. This program matches a volunteer adult male to a boy from a father-absent home. Through the one-to-one relationship, the boy's needs for guidance, adult friendship, and a positive male role model, have a greater opportunity of being met.

#### **The Big Brothers Program**

The Big Brothers Program is based on the concept that boys need the stabilizing and helpful influence of a mature and responsible man. The purpose of the program, as stated in the national manual, is to help the boy from a father-absent home to enjoy a one man-one boy relationship, through a friendship that is personally, socially, and psychologically adequate. Through this relationship, the organization seeks to prevent and correct problems which its boys may be experiencing, as well as promote their healthy growth and development. The value of the program lies in the personal relationship between the boy and the man, and the knowledge on the part of the boy that somebody is interested in him as an individual (Policy and Procedures Manual, 1982).

To be eligible to participate in the program, both the boys and the adult volunteers must meet certain criteria. To be a Little Brother, a boy must be between the ages of 6 and 16 years of age, be living in a father-absent home, and be without an adequate male figure in his life. To qualify as a Big Brother, a man must be mature and responsible, at least 21 years of age or older, and be in good standing in the community. He must be willing to make at least a one-year commitment to a boy, for 4-5 hours of interaction a week. He must accept the principles and philosophies of the program which promote the physical,

emotional, and mental well-being of a child. Finally, as stated in the national manual, (Big Brothers of Canada, 1977), "his friendship must have the qualities of patience, dependability and reliability, as well as a capacity for a sincere, close friendship, without conditions." (Section 2.3.1, p. 3).

Big Brothers of Edmonton and District have identified the development and enhancement of a child's self-esteem as the primary program objective. Self-esteem is defined by the agency as one's evaluation of one's self, and is made up of two parts:

1. a feeling of being worthwhile and valuable; and
2. a feeling of being competent.

A child's judgement of himself is largely influenced by the way significant others relate and respond to him, and this is particularly so for the child who is uncertain of his value. The Big Brother relationship is intended to enhance self-esteem by providing a boy with an adult male friend who will be a significant figure in his life, and who will respond and interact with him in a positive and growthful way. The child will feel valued by a male adult in a relationship in which he feels free to be himself, which increases his sense of self-worth. Also, the Big Brother will offer support, encouragement, and challenge to a boy to develop those competencies which will add to his feeling of being a worthwhile person (Big Brothers of Edmonton and District, 1982).

#### Statement of the Problem

This study examines the experiences of people in four mother-headed, single-parent families who have undergone a divorce and have chosen to become involved in the Big Brothers Program. The major purpose of the study is to investigate the effects of a Big Brother on the family.

The focus of the study is on the child in the context of his family, based on a family systems perspective. One of the basic principles of this perspective is that a change in one part (or member) will affect all other parts. When an adult male (the Big Brother) establishes a relationship with a boy in a mother-headed family, changes are thought to occur within that child. Also, changes are thought to occur within and between other members, and in the family as a whole. Investigating these changes, at both the individual and the family level, is the focus of this study.

To examine change, a pre-post research format was used. Thus, each family was interviewed prior to, and about six months after, the introduction of a Big Brother. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected to provide information on change from different perspectives. Qualitative data was obtained in personal interviews with the mother and the child individually, and in family interviews. The families, and family change, was assessed and described using the Family Rating Scale, a family assessment tool developed by the researcher. Quantitative data was collected using two tests--the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventories, and the Bene-Anthony Family Relations Test. The specific research questions are:

1. Are there measurable changes in the level of self-esteem of the child and his mother?
2. Are there measurable changes in the boy's perception of family relationships?
3. Are there observable and measurable changes in five dimensions of the family system? These dimensions are: family structure; family cohesion; family adaptability; family communication; and family affect.
4. Are there common themes and experiences among the families that can be identified?

This study is based on a number of assumptions, which are:

- i) Individual and family change is observable and measurable.
- ii) The Self-Esteem Inventories and Family Relations Test measure what they purport to measure.
- iii) A 1/2-hour sample of family interaction will approximate a family's 'typical' interaction pattern and style.
- iv) The Family Rating Scale does assess that interaction.
- v) Any change in a family's patterns of interaction suggest a change in the way the family system functions.
- vi) Changes in level of self-esteem, perception of family relationships, and in family interaction can be attributed, at least partially, to the involvement of a Big Brother in that family.



### **A. Significance of the Study**

The results of this study will be of general interest to those working with single-parent families, including social workers, psychologists, and family therapists. The study should be of specific interest to Big Brothers agencies, as well as other matching agencies, to better understand the effects of their programs and the dynamics that develop through an adult-child friendship relationship. As this study is exploratory in nature, it is hoped that the results could be used as a base from which further studies could be undertaken. In addition, the study design and results may be useful in designing an on-going program monitoring and evaluation strategy.

The particular research methodology used should be of interest to those involved in studying families and family change. The value of using such a complex methodology, including the pre-post format, individual and family level measures, and quantitative and qualitative data, can be assessed from the study results. Other community agencies such as those involved with placing foster children and newly adopted children, may be interested in the methodology as a framework for studying similar types of non-family relationships and their impact on the family. Finally, use of the Family Rating Scale, in particular, will provide feedback on its usefulness as a family assessment tool.

### **B. Personal Statement**

Researching single-parent families and, specifically, the impact of a Big Brother on the single-parent family, is more than an academic interest on the author's part. I have been a single parent for a number of years, and my two boys each have a Big Brother. From my personal experiences with the program, I view it as very positive and effective, and have seen both my boys and other boys in the program relate and talk about their Big Brothers with love, enthusiasm, and respect. I have also had considerable contact with mothers in the program, and have learned from their perceptions of how a Big Brother has influenced themselves, their sons, and families.



### **C. Overview of Chapters**

In this chapter, a summary of the research problem, overview of the Big Brothers Program, research questions and assumptions, and significance of the study, has been provided. In Chapter II, the theoretical framework on which the study is based will be discussed. The methodology and research procedures are outlined in Chapter III. Chapter IV consists of a presentation of the study results and interpretation of those results. Conclusions and implications are provided in the final chapter.

## **II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The general topic explored in this study--the impact of an adult 'friend' on the individual and family--is rather unique, and previous research on the subject could not be found. In this chapter, two major areas will be discussed which make up the theoretical framework on which this study is based. The first area is the theoretical underpinnings of the Family Rating Scale. A number of concepts from family systems theory are discussed including family structure, cohesion, adaptability, communication, and affect. Using these concepts, the Family Rating Scale was developed, and the families and family change are assessed. The second area discussed is some of the research and literature on the single-parent family, specifically the divorce process and the characteristics of this family form. This section provides a theoretical base from which to understand the individuals and families involved in this study.

### **A. Theoretical Underpinnings of the Family Rating Scale**

A system has been defined as a collection of interdependent parts and the relationships that exist between those parts. The parts interact with one another so that each influences and in turn is influenced by other parts, together producing a whole--a system--that is larger than the sum of its parts. A family system is a social system, with properties all its own, one that has evolved a set of rules, roles, power structures, forms of communication, and ways of problem solving and negotiating that allow various tasks to be effectively performed (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1980). Some of these properties will be examined under five broad dimensions: family structure, family cohesion, family adaptability, family communication, and family affect.

#### **Family Structure**

Family structure, as outlined by Minuchin, is "...the invisible set of functional demands that organizes the ways in which family members interact" (Minuchin, 1974, p. 51). Over time, a family develops patterns of interaction which determine how, when, and to whom the members relate. These patterns underpin the system, are largely unconscious, and regulate the behavior of family members. They also influence the way individual members experience themselves and their family.

The structure of a family can be characterized in terms of subsystems and boundaries. The family system carries out its functions and differentiates through subsystems. Each individual is a subsystem, as are dyads such as mother-child. Larger subgroupings are formed by task (parental subsystem), gender (grandmother, mother, daughter), and generation (the sibling subsystem). Each member belongs to several subsystems simultaneously, and in each has different levels of power and learns differentiated skills. Minuchin identifies three subsystems typical of most families: the spouse, parental (or executive), and sibling subsystems. The spouse subsystem is formed when two adults of the opposite sex join to form a family. This subsystem has specific tasks vital to family functioning: one of the major tasks is the development of boundaries that protect the spouses from intrusion by in-laws, children, and others, and giving them an area for the satisfaction of their own psychological needs. The subsystem may provide support for members in dealing with the extrafamilial world, and provide a haven from outside stresses. It also provides a model of intimate relationships to the children, expressed in daily interactions and ways of expressing affection, of relating to a stressed partner, and of dealing with conflict.

A new level of family formation is reached with the birth of the first child. The parental, or executive, subsystem performs the childrearing and socializing functions. The leadership style of a family's executive subsystem can range from leaderless to authoritarian. In a family with limited or erratic leadership, parental control is usually unsuccessful or rebuffed. At the other extreme are highly controlling parents with an authoritarian style of leadership. Between these two extremes are families with varying degrees of cooperative leadership styles.

The sibling subsystem forms a child's first peer group. It is here that children support, isolate, scapegoat, and learn from each other, particularly how to negotiate, cooperate, and compete. In large families, siblings typically organize themselves in a variety of subsystems according to developmental stages.

Boundaries are delineations between subsystems and between systems, and are the rules defining who participates, and how (Minuchin, 1974). Minuchin believes that, for proper family functioning, the boundaries of subsystems must be clear. They should be defined well enough to allow family members to carry out their tasks without undue

interference, and permit contact between individual members. The composition of subsystems that are organized around family functions is not as important as the clarity of its boundaries (Minuchin, 1974). For example, a parental subsystem that includes a grandmother or parental child can function quite well if the lines of authority and responsibility are clearly drawn.

One of the more common family problems involving subsystems and their boundaries is that of the coalition. A coalition is a process of joint action which is against a third person. For example, in a family the husband criticizes the wife, who seeks coalition with the child against his father. Spousal conflict is thus detoured through the child and the boundary between the parental and sibling subsystems becomes diffuse. If this pattern is repeated over time, a dysfunctional cross-generational subsystem of mother and son vs. the father appears and becomes a part of the system. The problem becomes most severe when the parent-child coalition is denied or concealed. In families having clear or rigid parental and sibling subsystem boundaries, this type of coalition is rare.

### **Family Cohesion**

Family cohesion is the emotional bonding that family members have toward one another; the degree of emotional closeness or distance in the family (Olson & Killorin, 1983). Cohesion can be understood and assessed using the concept of boundaries--individual, subsystem, and family system-extrafamilial boundaries. All families can be conceived as falling somewhere along a cohesion continuum whose poles are two extremes--diffuse boundaries (enmeshed) and overly rigid boundaries (disengaged).

At the diffuse end are families who turn upon themselves to develop their own microcosm and in which members are overconcerned and overinvolved in each others' lives. As a result, distance decreases and boundaries are blurred, and the differentiation of the family system diffuses. Enmeshment exists if emotional bonding is high, there is a high level of dependence of family members, external boundaries are closed and internal boundaries are blurred, "alone" time is minimized and friends, interests, and recreational activities must be shared by the family as a whole (Friesen, 1982).

At the other end of the continuum are families that develop overly rigid boundaries. In these disengaged families, communications across subsystems becomes difficult and



the protective functions of the family are handicapped. In extreme cases, members function autonomously but have a skewed sense of independence and lack feelings of belonging and loyalty, as well as the capacity for interdependence in terms of requesting support when needed. Signs of disengagement include: low emotional bonding and high independence of family members, closed internal boundaries, time apart from the family is maximized, and friends, interests, and recreation are individually and not family based (Friesen, 1982).

Minuchin states that most families fall within the wide normal range on the continuum. Clear boundaries exist between members, giving each a sense of "I-ness" along with an ingroup sense of "we." Thus, each member retains their own individuality but not at the expense of family belongingness. Subsystem boundaries are also clear and well-defined.

#### **Family Adaptability**

Family adaptability refers to the extent to which the family system is flexible and able to change its power structure, role relationships, and relationship rules in response to situational and developmental stress (Olson & Killorin, 1983). Like all systems, the family system has a tendency toward both maintenance and evolution (Minuchin, 1981). The family maintains a dynamic equilibrium around some central tendency, and undertake operations to restore that equilibrium whenever it is threatened. It offers resistance to change beyond a certain range, and maintains preferred patterns as long as possible. This is referred to as homeostasis, and a family's homeostatic mechanisms usually restrict behavior to a narrow range.

But the family structure must be able to change and evolve; a family is subject to inner pressure from developmental changes in its own members and subsystems and to outer pressure coming from demands to accommodate to the significant social institutions that have an impact on family members. The continued existence of the family system depends on a sufficient range of patterns, the availability of alternative transactional patterns, and the flexibility to mobilize them when necessary. Responding to the demands from both within and without requires a constant transformation of the position of family members in relation to one another, so they can grow while the family system maintains



continuity (Minuchin, 1974).

Key areas in which families must affect changes, due to developmental changes in members or situational changes from both within or outside the family, are in discipline and negotiation/ problem-solving, family roles, and family rules. For example, as children grow older, parents need to continually adapt their discipline and problem-solving styles to account for the increasing maturity and responsibility of their children. The family's problem-solving style refers to their ability to resolve problems to a level that maintains effective family functioning (Epstein, Bishop, & Levin, 1978).

Family roles are the repetitive patterns of behavior by which individuals fulfill family functions. A family member's role may be based on their personality characteristics, age, and sex, and define the expected, permitted, as well as forbidden patterns of behavior.

Families may develop unique roles and these can be either adaptive or maladaptive. Goldenberg & Goldenberg (1980) discuss some common maladaptive roles such as the family scapegoat. This is often assigned to a child who is seen as always in trouble, bad, uncontrollable, and the cause of the family's problems. The family may actually need that person to blame for any sign of family dysfunction or disharmony. The role of family pet may also be cast in some families, where one child is viewed as ideal or perfect, the model child. The child as "pet" may be required to bring laughter and lightness to the family.

A family is a rule-governed system, and the rules are unwritten, nonverbally agreed upon behaviors that are outside the awareness of family members. All families follow rules for dividing power, labour, and so on, to carry out the tasks of daily living. A family's rules require members to behave in an organized, repetitive pattern of interaction with one another. Thus, the entire system can be run by a relatively small set of rules governing relationships. If the rules of a family are understood, how members together define their relationship can be understood. Every family has a range of flexibility (or variation) from family rules and patterns of behavior that allows the system to continue to function without the development of a crisis.

Families can be seen to adapt and change various areas such as discipline and problem-solving styles, roles, and rules somewhere along a continuum from rigid to chaotic. At the rigid extreme are families that resist change, have an autocratic "law and

order" discipline style, limited and strictly defined roles, unchanging rules, and limited family negotiations. At the other extreme are chaotic families with laissez-faire and ineffective styles of discipline, a lack of role clarity and frequent role shifts and reversals, frequent rule changes, endless negotiations, and impulsive problem-solving style. In the middle range would be families with flexible adaptability, where roles and rules are well-defined but which can be re-assessed and revised when the situation requires it. The discipline style would be typically democratic, roles would be fluid and shared, rules could be changed, and negotiations would be flexible.

### **Family Communication**

A number of family theorists, notably Virginia Satir, have been interested in how and what families communicate. The word "communicate" refers to nonverbal and verbal behavior within a social context, and thus can mean "transaction" or "interaction." Communication also includes those clues and symbols used by people in giving and receiving meaning (Satir, 1967). A family's manner of communicating will elucidate the underlying patterns of behavior.

Communication can be thought of as congruent or incongruent. A congruent communication is one where verbal and non-verbal messages match. An incongruent communication, then, is one in which the messages sent by the verbal and non-verbal channels are contradictory. Families can be characterized according to the degree of clarity of expression between members, which can range from frequent unclear, incongruent messages to generally clear and congruent messages.

In addition to the degree to which messages are clear, families can also be characterized according to how free members are to discuss themselves, their feelings, and relationships. In some families, members freely and openly discuss such matters; in other families, such discussions are rare.

Another dimension of family communication is the frequency with which members speak for one another or make "mind reading" statements. This is referred to as invasiveness, and can be assessed along a continuum ranging from many to no invasions.

Finally, communication between members can be characterized according to the degree of respect and regard displayed for the feelings and messages of others. This can

vary from lack of respect or overtly disrespectful, to consistently respectful of others' feelings and messages.

### **Family Affect**

Family affect can be conceptualized as the feeling-tone of a family, or the typical affective state displayed by family members. Minuchin (1974) points out that many families demonstrate a predominant affect and adhere to a restricted mood level regardless of the content of the issues they are discussing. For example, one family may constantly tease and joke while another may maintain an apathetic, depressed quality. For a particular family, affect is a clue as to what is allowable.

Family affect can be broken down into three dimensions: range of feelings; mood and tone; and unresolvable conflict (Lewis, Beavers, Gossett, & Phillips, 1976). Range of feelings refers to the degree to which a family system is characterized by a wide range to little or no expression of feelings. The mood and tone of a family is the typical feeling-tone of that family's interactions, which can range from cynical, hopeless, and pessimistic to usually warm, affectionate, and optimistic.

All families can be expected to have conflicts; however, families vary according to how poorly or well they resolve the conflict. Some families have methods for defusing conflict that operate automatically and swiftly, and thus issues are rarely resolved. An example is the child who becomes disruptive or displays symptoms whenever his or her parents begin to enter conflict. Alternatively, conflict in the spouse subsystem may be avoided by scapegoating a son. These are described by Minuchin as dysfunctional, conflict-detouring mechanisms. Other families may rigidly deny the existence of any conflict, and quickly defuse any differences or dissension. Families can thus be seen to range on this dimension from extreme conflict with severe impairment of group functioning, to the opposite extreme of having little or no unresolvable conflict.

### **B. The Single-Parent Family**

A single-parent family is a household led by one parent (man or woman), due to separation/divorce, desertion, death, or to never having married. As all of the families involved in the present study are single-parent, mother-headed families due to separation

or divorce, a sampling of the literature on the process of divorce and the characteristics of the single-parent family will be presented.

### **The process of divorce**

In this study, divorce is viewed as a family crisis requiring major transitions for all family members. Members must make a shift from the family situation when the parents lived together, through a period of disequilibrium and disorganization associated with the physical separation, through a period when family members are experimenting with a variety of coping mechanisms, followed (usually) by reorganization and the eventual attainment of a new pattern of equilibrium in a single-parent household.

In two classic studies of divorce by Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) and Hetherington, Cox, and Cox (1978, 1979), researchers found adjustment to divorce to be a several-stage process.

#### **1) The stressful first year**

Both studies documented the severe stress and disorganization experienced by family members in the first year after the physical separation. The Wallerstein and Kelly study, in particular, detailed the typical responses of children in the first year--extreme anger, fear, sadness, aggression, regression, neediness, and delays in development. The children's initial responses were largely governed by their gender and age. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980), as well as a number of other researchers (Biller, 1974; Hetherington et al., 1978; Lamb, 1977; McDermott, 1968) have suggested that boys cope less effectively with divorce than do girls, and the effects are more enduring. Boys may have a more difficult time because their same-sex role models (fathers) are usually the persons who disengage from family roles (Hetherington, 1979). The ability of children to cope and adjust is also contingent on certain developmental capacities associated with the age of the child. The approximate age range of three to nine years has been identified by researchers as the most vulnerable time for children to experience parental divorce and disengagement (Biller, 1974; Hetherington et al., 1978; Lamb, 1977; Longfellow, 1979; Santrock, 1975, 1977; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980). Children in this age range often blame themselves for the divorce, define disengagement of the non-custodial parent severely, and appear to have few crisis-meeting resources (Despert, 1962; Longfellow,



1979; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980).

The Hetherington et al. study described the parents as anxious, depressed, rejected, angry, and incompetent. The effects were more sustained for divorced mothers, particularly for divorced mothers of boys who, at the end of two years, were still feeling more angry, anxious, incompetent, and externally controlled than were married mothers or divorced mothers of girls (1978).

In addition, the parent's personal and emotional adjustment deteriorated in the year following divorce. This seemed to be a period in which they were testing a variety of coping mechanisms--many of them unsuccessful--in dealing with changes and stresses in their new life situations.

In terms of parent-child relations, the interaction patterns between divorced parents and their children differed significantly from those of intact families on many variables studied. These differences were greatest during the first year and still evident, though reduced, at the end of the second year. Hetherington et al. state, "divorced parents make fewer maturity demands of their children, communicate less well with their children, tend to be less affectionate with their children, and show marked inconsistency in discipline and lack of control over their children in comparison to parents in intact families" (1978, p. 424). The children in divorced families were found to be more dependent, disobedient, aggressive, whining, demanding, and unaffectionate than children in intact families. In general, children exhibited more negative behavior with their mothers than with their fathers.

Poor parenting was most apparent in divorced mothers with their sons, who were less consistent, communicated less and used more negative sanctions with sons than with daughters. In fact, the mother-son relationship was found to be a particularly troubling one, characterized by what the researchers called a 'cycle of negative parent-child interaction' (Hetherington et al., 1977). A decline in the mother's parenting skills was associated with increased aggressive and other undesirable behaviors by her son; this increased aggressive behavior was associated with increased coercive behavior on the part of the mother which, when ineffective, not only increased her son's negative behaviors but also her own feelings of helplessness and incompetence. In general, poor parenting seemed most marked one year after divorce, which appeared to be a peak of



stress in parent-child relations.

Both studies found the relationship between the divorced parents to be characterized by conflict. Divorce is typically seen to be a solution to "irreconcilable differences" and conflict, and yet the researchers found that family conflict did not decline, but escalated in the first year. At two months following divorce, Hetherington et al. found that relations with the ex-spouse and children remained the most salient and preoccupying concern for divorced parents. Most (66%) of the exchanges in this period involved conflicts, commonly about finances and support, visitation and childrearing, and intimate relations with others. The relationships between most of the divorced couples were characterized by acrimony, anger, feelings of desertion, resentment, and memories of painful conflicts, as well as by considerable ambivalence and attachment which, in some cases, increased. With time, both conflict and attachment decreased, although anger and resentment were sustained longer by mothers than by fathers. The children were generally exposed to parental arguments, mutual denigration, and recrimination. Often, the child was enmeshed in their parent's conflict and placed in a situation of conflicting loyalties.

## 2) Transition period

In the Hetherington et al. study (1979), the researchers found the first to second year to be a period of marked recovery and constructive adaptation. However, since the study lasted only two years, they were unable to determine whether the re-stabilizing process was complete, or whether readjustment would continue over a longer period of time. The researchers found that, over the course of the two years, divorced fathers became increasingly less available to their children. A pervasive concern of the fathers was the sense of loss of their children. For most this declined with time, but for many it was a continuing concern. A number of fathers who had been highly involved and attached parents prior to separation reported that they could not endure the pain of seeing their children only intermittently. By two years after divorce these fathers had coped with this stress by seeing their children infrequently although they continued to experience a great sense of loss and depression.

The researchers also found that, by the second year after divorce, a process of restabilization and adjustment in the parent's personal and emotional state was apparent. The parenting practices of divorced mothers had improved--they were demanding more

autonomous, mature behavior of their children, communicated better, and used more explanations and reasoning. Mothers were more nurturant and consistent, and were better able to control their children than before.

Wallerstein and Kelly found that, in over half of the families studied, the transition period lasted two to three years. This period was marked by many external changes in the social, economic, and family circumstances, as well as by improved family relations.

### 3) Re-stabilized postdivorce family, or new marriage

The third stage was the early years within the re-stabilized postdivorce family or the new marriage. These families were found to be a diverse group. Some had succeeded in creating a stable, loving home and improving the quality of life for all members. At the other end of the spectrum were those families whose members were unhappy or no happier than they had been during the failed marriage.

Both studies identified a number of factors that were associated with the positive adjustment of the child. Interestingly enough, these relate more to the characteristics of the parents, and the relationship between the divorced partners, than to the child. Some of these are:

- the extent to which the parents had resolved and put aside their anger and conflicts, and made use of the relief from conflict provided by divorce;
- the resumption or improvement of the custodial parent's handling of the child;
- the extent to which the child did not feel rejected in relation to the non-custodial parent and the extent to which this relationship had continued on a regular basis;
- the range of personality assets and deficits which the child brought to the divorce;
- the availability to the child of a supportive human network; and
- the absence of continuing anger and depression in the child (Wallerstein, 1980).

Also, frequent contact of the father and child was associated with more positive mother-child interactions and with more positive adjustment of the child. These studies showed that neither the divorced fathers or the children were happy with the intermittent visiting arrangements so typical of custody decisions.

Wallerstein and Kelly found that the role of the father was two-fold in its potential effect on the child's social and psychological development. The negative effect of erratic, irregular visiting or no visiting on the child was such that the child was disappointed

repeatedly, left the child feeling rejected, and lowered their self-esteem. These children were most likely to feel unloved and unlovable, despite their anger at the rejecting father.

The positive effect of a frequent and regular visiting schedule, particularly for younger children, was also apparent. The authors state: "Specifically, good father-child relationships appeared linked to high self-esteem and the absence of depression in children of both sexes and at all ages" (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980, p. 219). Children who had a good father-child relationship on a continuing basis over the years were more likely to be in good psychological health.

Other support systems (parents, grandparents, siblings, housekeeper) were also found to be a factor in positive adjustment, but was not quite as important as a positive, supportive relationship between the divorced couple and the continued involvement of the father with the child.

An extremely important point made by Wallerstein and Kelly is that, although the initial breakup is extremely stressful, the eventual outcome depends not only on what has been lost, but in large measure on what has been created to take the place of the failed marriage. They state: "In full and proper perspective, the effect of the divorce is an index of the success or failure of the participants, parents and children, to master the disruption, to negotiate the transition successfully, and to create a more gratifying family to replace the family that failed" (Wallerstein, 1980, p. 305).

### **Characteristics of the Single-Parent Family**

#### **1. Task Overload**

The two-parent family, according to Weiss (1979), has a good deal of spare capacity. The husband may not regularly help with child care or housework, but he can if there is need for him to do so. If the wife begins taking an evening class or a child is ill, he can pitch in. The single-parent, without this spare capacity in the household, is much more vulnerable to task overload. This can happen whenever the single-parent takes on something extra, even something that may not seem overly demanding. Many single-parents function at or near capacity under ordinary circumstances; unanticipated demand then produces task overload.

Task overload is produced by the frustration of not being able to complete everything that must be done, and the feeling that failure is inescapable. It can occur when the single-parent has been operating for some time at the limits of their capacity and has accumulated both fatigue and tasks not yet done. If the single-parent not only assumes responsibility for housekeeping and child care, but also undertakes full-time employment, the parent has become committed to two full-time jobs.

## 2. Financial Duress

Mother-headed, single-parent families make up a large percentage of families living in poverty. Economic hardship frequently forces women to work who would otherwise prefer to remain in the home or who are not highly enough skilled to obtain positions that can pay for adequate child care. If the mother begins to work around the time of dissolution of the marriage and the quality of substitute child care is inadequate, the child can experience the double loss of mother and father simultaneously (Hetherington et al, 1977). Contributing to the parents' financial duress is the fact that not all families receive child support, and even those who receive it often receive an inadequate amount.

## 3. Responsibility Overload

Weiss states that it is the single-parent's sole responsibility to provide for whatever the children need physically, medically, educationally, financially, or in any other way. Whatever decisions must be made, it is the single-parent's responsibility to make them. For some, so much responsibility can be both dismaying and overwhelming. Single-parents are also solely responsible for the way children turn out. Weiss states: "Whatever happens to the children, there is only one parent who has been making decisions for them, and it is that parent's responsibility. Single-parents, even more than other parents, worry about the effects their childrearing practices are having on their children's characters" (Weiss, 1979, p. 269).

Also, the recognition that the children have no one else to turn to, no other parent who might buffer the single parent's misperceptions and mistakes, makes their responsibility even more burdensome. In two-parent families, a well-adjusted and loving parent can help counteract the effects of a rejecting, emotionally unstable parent.

## 4. Emotional overload



Weiss found that the constant uninterrupted attending to children, often accompanied by feelings of responsibility or task overload, perhaps taking place against a background of loneliness or social isolation, can overtax the single-parent's emotional resilience.

Emotional overload occurs because the parent's emotional resilience proves inadequate for the number and intensity of demands from children. The absence of relief from constant availability produces emotional depletion, a sense of having nothing more to give. Yet there continues to be no relief, nor any way of turning the children off, nor any prospect that the situation will change. Unrelieved responsibility for children appears especially likely to be depleting when there is no one attending to the parent's needs. It is then as though the parent's emotional economy were running at a constant deficit. This can lead to depression, a vulnerability of single parents, especially those who are most determined to devote themselves to their children.

#### 5. Social isolation and a lack of social and emotional support

A number of researchers have found that divorced women are likely to have fewer friends, belong to fewer organizations, and participate in fewer recreational activities than do married women (Anspach, 1976; Hetherington et al., 1977; Marsden, 1969; Pearlin and Johnson, 1975; Spicer and Hampe, 1975; Stack, 1972). This social isolation is often associated with acute depression (Hetherington et al., 1977). One of the findings that is notable is that family contacts with parents and siblings do not ameliorate this loneliness. A social network and the formation of friendships and intimate attachments seem critical (Pearlin and Johnson, 1975; Hetherington et al., 1977).

It might be thought that the presence of children would attenuate this sense of loneliness; however, recent studies (Hetherington et al., 1977; Weiss, 1977) suggest that the presence of children may actually make mothers feel more unhappy, frustrated, helpless, anxious, and incompetent.

#### 6. The ending of parental echelon

One major way the structure of the one-parent family tends to be different from the two-parent family is the lack of a parental echelon. An echelon structure is an authority structure in which an implicit partnership agreement exists among those on a superordinate level so that anyone on the higher level has authority in relation to anyone on



the lower level (Weiss, 1977). Two-parent families generally maintain this type of authority structure. However, without at least two members on the superordinate level, an echelon structure will not be formed; thus, without the second parent in the home, the echelon system of the two-parent family collapses.

The absence of echelon makes it possible for the parent to redefine family roles and responsibilities. In particular, it permits the children to be defined as having responsibilities and rights in the household not very different from the parent's own. Children can be asked not only to perform additional chores (this would be possible within an echelon structure), but also to participate in deciding what is to be done. The parent continues to carry ultimate responsibility for the family--but even when the parent makes the decision, the parent is likely to discuss the issue with the children and to do what is possible to reduce their objections. In most instances, single-parents move quite far toward sharing responsibility for family management with their children.

To someone accustomed to the management of two-parent households, single-parent households can appear extremely permissive. The parent gives greater weight to the children's wishes than is customary in two-parent households, while the children, as befits junior partners, are less deferential towards their parents. However, in an over-permissive two-parent family, the parents retain authority / responsibility while requiring little contribution to family functioning from children. In the one-parent family, authority and responsibility are more nearly shared, and at the same time much is required of the children.

a) One of the outcomes of this is that the children grow up a little faster (Weiss, 1979). With the increased authority and responsibility required of them, as well as being called on by the parent for companionship, understanding, or support, children in single-parent households often become surprisingly self-reliant and adult in their manner. Children are allowed to develop, along with a sort of responsible independence, feelings of self-sufficiency. Whether there is something lost to children in growing up faster is difficult to say. Children who have had more to do than their peers sometimes regret the absence of a more nearly carefree childhood, and some who have had to look after themselves from the time they were small may harbor unmet needs for nurturance.

b) Role reversals and role changes

Whereas the above changes in family functioning are modifications in roles, role reversals and changes are fundamental changes in assumptions underlying parent-child relationships. Changes in roles are made possible by the lack of the parental echelon--which holds parents to their parental roles. In the single-parent family, there is no barrier to children becoming both their parents' companion and their partner, and still further modifications of parent-child understandings.

In role reversals, the children become care providers for their parents, supportive or nurturant or directing in the way that parents ordinarily are with their children. This is especially likely to occur immediately following the physical separation when the single parents feel unhappy and upset, makes their distress evident to their children, and turn to them for sympathy or support. The children assume responsibility for helping the parent to recover (Weiss, 1977).

Minuchin (1974) views the allocation of parental power to a child as a natural arrangement in single-parent families (as well as in large families or in families where both parents work). This allows the "parental child" to develop responsibility, competence, and autonomy beyond his years, while the younger children are cared for. A family with a parental child structure may run into difficulty, however, if the delegation of authority is not explicit or if the parent abdicates, leaving the child to become the main source of control, guidance, and decisions. In the latter case, the demands of the parental child can clash with his own childhood needs and exceed his ability to cope with them.

Weiss states that we do not know the effects on children of persisting role reversals. Children seem to take role reversals of brief duration entirely in stride, and this may, in fact, be necessary in the single-parent family due to the increased number of tasks that need to be done.

More persistent than role reversals may be shifts from parent-child complementarity to a complementarity more appropriate in a husband-wife relationship. A change of this sort occurs when a single mother relies on her son to take on the responsibilities of "man of the house," such as household repairs and care and management of the children. A child's playing a complementary role makes it possible for the parent to function within the role they may have become accustomed to in marriage. At the same time, it provides the child the gratification of earning the parent's respect, and

the reassurance of being not only loved, but also indispensable.

c) Problems with discipline

Instead of role complementarity, a child may display role competition and may attempt to displace the parent as the leader of the household. The absence of a second parent produces a situation in which the parent, without an adult ally, makes it more difficult to act authoritatively--the single-parent situation inhibits parental authoritarianism. Because single-parents are so dependent on their children's cooperation, they have management problems different from those of parents in two-parent households.

The single mother may confront specific problems of authority in discipline. Children view fathers as more powerful and threatening than mothers; thus, the single mother may have to be supermother to counter the image of greater authority and power vested in males in our culture (Hetherington, 1979).

7. Closer to the children

One compensation of being a single-parent is that there is opportunity to be closer to the children. There is no second adult in the household with whom parenthood must be shared, to whom loyalty is owed, or who distracts the parent's attention. In a one-parent household, the parent has only the children to talk to. Increased closeness is not necessarily a product of increased time with each other, but comes about as a result of a broader sector of interchange, as well as increased parental accessibility during those times when parent and children are together.

As one consequence of this increased closeness, the single-parent family may develop a sense of common cause and of strong family boundaries not often seen in two-parent families. However, this can go too far and single-parent households may become very tightly bound together and interdependent (Walker and Messinger, 1978). This is particularly so when the departing parent leaves the community and seldom visits his children. Closing the family boundaries may help assuage the feelings of loss and pain, especially when the separation process was very traumatic, and reassure members that what is left of the nuclear family is relatively intact. This closedness can also result in over-protectiveness. This seems to be particularly likely when the custodial parent has resisted other opportunities for emotional investment, and there is no other adult to whom they are close. Thus, the parent focuses largely on the children's well-being.

## Summary

In this chapter, the theoretical framework on which the study is based was presented. The theoretical underpinnings of the Family Rating Scale were outlined and it is with this scale that families and family change will be assessed. To better understand the families involved in the study, a sampling of the vast literature on single-parent families was presented.

This review highlighted some particular areas of concern to this study. The majority of families involved in the Big Brothers program have experienced the family crisis of a separation or divorce. The short-term and long-term impact of this on members will vary according to a number of interacting factors such as the age of the child at the time of the physical separation, the relationship between the ex-spouses, and the relationship between the non-custodial parent (usually the father) and the children. The boys involved in the program may be a 'high risk' for a number of reasons:

- gender. Boys, in both the short and long-term, have a more difficult time adjusting to divorce than do girls. The mother-son relationship is also more difficult, and discipline problems are common.
- age. Younger children, particularly those between three and nine years of age, seem to have a more difficult time than very young or older children. Many of the boys in the program are in the age range six to twelve.
- lack of regular contact with the father. This was found to be a very important factor in the positive functioning of the boy and the family, and yet the boys in the program have little or no contact with their fathers. Lack of contact was found to be related to low self-esteem. Also, the longer-term absence of a male role model may limit the boys' social, cognitive, and emotional development.

With the involvement of a Big Brother a number of changes, at both the individual and family level, may take place. At the family level, the boundaries of the family may need to open to allow an 'outsider' into the family. The relationship may increase his level of self-esteem, as well as increase his mother's self-esteem, as she may get some relief in having another adult involved in a meaningful way with her son. Both members feeling better about themselves may improve the mother-son relationship. Finally, the experience of family overload may be reduced, particularly for the mother, and the boy may again



have the opportunity to be a child, play sports, and so on, away from the responsibilities he may be facing in the single-parent household.



### III. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This study used a variety of methods to examine families from different levels and perspectives. This multi-method approach provided rich sources of data to understand individuals, families, and family change. First, self-report data was obtained from family members (or 'insiders'), and families were assessed by 'outsiders'--the researcher-observer and an observer-rater. Both qualitative and quantitative data was obtained. Qualitative sources included personal interviews with the mother and child, and family interviews; quantitative data was obtained through the administration of standardized tests. The family interviews offered information from all of the above perspectives; that is, they combined self-report and qualitative data in the answers to the questions (content level), and quantitative information at the process level (such as how and by whom questions were answered). Finally, data was obtained to assess change at both the individual level and family level. Each family was assessed and interviewed twice at both the pre-and-post sessions, for a total of 16 sessions. Pre-testing took place in November and December, 1984, and the post-testing sessions were in May and June of 1985.

This study is considered to be an exploratory study to determine whether the methodology would be useful as a means for assessing impact and change. This could be used as a base for further study and/or integrated as an ongoing component of the Big Brothers Program. Due to this, and the small sample size, the findings are not considered to be generalizable to all families in the Big Brothers Program, or to single-parent families in general. Rather, each family's situation was considered to be unique and is presented in a descriptive case-study format.

#### A. The Study Sample

Five families were originally involved in the research study. Each family, at the time of selection, was at the point of match with a Big Brother. That is, the child, or Little Brother, had been matched with a Big Brother but had not yet been introduced to him. The families were randomly selected within the time period October to December 1984. Thus, all families who were at the point of match within that time period were asked to participate in the study, provided they met the following criteria:

- the families were mother-headed due to a separation or divorce (rather than widowed or never married);
- the family had not previously been involved with a Big Brother or any other adult male volunteer.

The Big Brother caseworker initially asked the mothers to participate in the research study. After obtaining her consent, the researcher contacted the mother by phone and discussed the purpose and importance of the study, the time commitments required, and answered questions and concerns. The purpose of the study was worded, in a general manner, "to explore the family's experiences around having a Big Brother." It was explained that the research would help those involved in the program better understand what type of effects, if any, the program was having on the Little Brothers and their families.

At the six-month follow-up, one of the five families could no longer be included in the sample as the father had moved back into the home and the Big Brother had been transferred to another boy. Of the four remaining families, one family no longer fit the research criteria as two Big Brothers had been involved with the family. The first Big Brother had been unexpectedly transferred to another province, and the second Big Brother had only been involved with the family about one month prior to the post-test session. This family was, however, still interviewed and included in the study. Thus, at six months, three of the original five families interviewed had been involved with one Big Brother throughout the entire study period. This was seen as one of the many hazards of a pre-post research methodology.

The four study families consisted of 13 individuals. Three families had one boy matched with a Big Brother, and the fourth family had two boys who were each matched with a Big Brother. The four mothers ranged in age from 31 to 40 years; their children were from 8 to 12 years of age. The mothers' average level of education completed was grade 12. The length of years in the marriage prior to physical separation ranged from 4 to 14 years. The length of time since the separation ranged from four to nine years. All mothers had only been married once.

## B. Data Collection Procedure

Four sessions were conducted with each family--two, just prior to meeting the child's Big Brother, and two sessions about six months later. The two sessions, both pre and post, adhered to the following format.

### Session #1

- i) Personal interview with the mother, about one hour in length. These interviews were audio-taped for later analysis.
  - ii) Administration of the Family Relations Test to the child, and a very brief personal interview with him.
  - iii) Administration of the Self-Esteem Inventory to the mother and the child.
- This session took place in the Big Brothers' office.

### Session #2.

Several days after Session #1, the family was interviewed together using the family interview questions. Interviews were video-taped and later observer-rated, using the Family Rating Scale. This session was about 30-40 minutes in length and took place in the family's home.

## C. Research Procedures

### Individual Level

#### Personal Interviews with Mother

Two semi-structured interviews with the mother were designed to obtain her perceptions of the family and of changes influenced by the involvement of the Big Brother. A large portion of the first personal interview consisted of questions concerning family history, particularly the separation and divorce, the adjustment process, and members' contact and relationship with the father. This provided an information base from which to understand each family and the possible changes that may occur.

Based on the review of the literature, the author's own experience, and the experience of the staff of Big Brothers, certain questions were created to tap relevant areas. These questions assessed:

- at what point the family and individual members are in the divorce adjustment

process.

- factors which may influence family members' adjustment to living in a single-parent household, such as the mother's support system, mother's relationship to her ex-spouse and her feelings about being a single-parent, the degree of conflict before and after the physical separation, and the type and quality of the children's contact with their father.

Also, information in the first interview was obtained on each family's reasons for contacting the Big Brother agency, the mother's hopes and expectations of the relationship her son may have with a Big Brother and her feelings about having a non-family, adult male (a Big Brother) involved in her family. Finally, some questions were included in both the pre-and-post interviews to assess possible changes in specific areas identified as important by the Big Brother's caseworkers. These questions assessed:

- the Little Brother's school performance, grades, and any behavior problems or concerns in the classroom;
- behavior problems or concerns in the home;
- the Little Brother's relationship with peers; and
- the Little Brother's attitude towards 'men in general.'

The second personal interview was designed to explore the mother's perception of any changes that may have been influenced by the involvement of a Big Brother. First, information was obtained on any major change that occurred in the family during the six-month time period, such as a move to a new house or change in the family's financial situation. Although these factors could not be controlled, knowledge of them was important in understanding family change at the post-test/ interview session. The remaining questions assessed behavioral changes in the Little Brother, as mentioned previously, and assessed the following areas:

- mother's perception of the Big Brother-Little Brother relationship;
- whether the relationship has met the mother's hopes and expectations; and
- mother's perception of changes in the relationship between family members and changes in the type or quality of the father-son contact.

### Personal Interviews with the Child (Little Brother)

Both interviews were very brief and were designed to get to know the child and help him feel comfortable prior to the administration of the Family Relations Test.

### Self-Esteem Inventories--Stanley Coopersmith

As discussed in Chapter 1, enhancement of a child's self-esteem is the main objective of the Big Brothers of Edmonton and District agency. For this reason it was thought to be important to specifically assess the Little Brother's level of self-esteem at both the pre-and-post sessions to determine any changes. In addition, the mother's level of self-esteem was also assessed to monitor possible changes. The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI) was chosen to assess self-esteem as it is a widely used and well-standardized test instrument. It was designed to measure "evaluative attitudes toward the self in social, academic, family, and personal areas of experience" (Coopersmith, 1981, p. 1). The term 'self-esteem' refers to the personal judgement of worthiness expressed in the attitudes one holds towards the self. The Self-Esteem Inventories are made up of short statements such as "I often feel upset with my work," and which are answered either "like me" or "unlike me" (see Appendix A).

Two forms of the SEI were used in the study--the Adult Form, administered to the mother, and the School Form, administered to the Little Brother. The School Form was designed for use with children aged 8 to 15. It consists of 58 items, 50 of which are self-esteem items and 8 items that constitute a lie scale, which is a measure of the child's test wiseness or defensiveness. The self-esteem items yield a total score and separate scores for four subscales: General Self, Social Self-Peers, Home-Parents, and School-Academic. The Adult Form was designed for use with persons aged 16 and older. It consists of 25 items and yields one total score.

The Coopersmith SEI's have been used in well over 100 studies. Reliability and validity data presented are representative of those studies, and apply only to the School Form (Coopersmith, 1981).

#### i) Reliability

internal consistency: Kimball (1972) administered the SEI to approximately 7600 public school children of all socio-economic ranges, in grades 4 to 8.

Kuder-Richardson reliability estimates were generated for each grade level. Obtained



coefficients ranged from .87 to .92.

subscale and item intercorrelations: Donaldson (1974) calculated subscale intercorrelations for 643 public school children, made up of mostly lower and middle socio-economic ranges, in grades three to eight. Obtained coefficients ranged from .02 to .52.

stability: Test-retest reliability was reported by Coopersmith (1967) to be .88 for a sample of 50 children in grade 5 (five-week interval), and .70 for a sample of 56 children (three-year interval).

### ii) Validity

Kokenes (1974, 1978) undertook a study of SEI construct validity. Her studies involved over 7600 school children in grades 4 to 8, and were designed to observe the comparative importance of the home, peers, and school to the global self-esteem of adolescents and preadolescents. Her study "confirmed the construct validity of the sub-scales proposed by Coopersmith as measuring sources of self-esteem" (Coopersmith, 1981, p. 13).

### The Family Relations Test--Eva Bene and James Anthony

The Family Relations Test was designed to explore a child's emotional relations with family members and to help children express emotional attitudes of which they are aware but which they might find difficult to verbalize. The test has two forms--one for young children and one for older children. The form for young children was used in this study. It is made up of 48 items such as "(child's name) thinks you are nice. Who is nice?" (see Appendix B).

Test materials consist of 20 figures representing people of various ages, shapes, and sizes. The child is asked to choose one figure to represent each member of his family, including himself. An additional figure, representing 'nobody' is also included in the child's family group, which accommodates those items that are not felt to apply to any of the family members. Each figure is attached to a box with a slit in the top. The items are printed on individual cards and the child's task is to put each card 'into the person' whom the message fits best.

Scoring consists of adding up the total number of items that went to each person within each area (positive feelings outgoing, negative feelings outgoing, positive feelings

incoming, and negative feelings incoming). The distribution of feeling can be thought of in terms of 'experienced' feeling emanating from the child, and 'imagined' feeling directed towards the child (Bene & Anthony, 1957). The total score (degree of involvement) and the separate scores for each area show how much of each kind of feeling the child has assigned to each family member.

#### Modifications

The Family Relations Test was used to measure possible shifts in the child's feelings toward family members with the involvement of the Big Brother. In the pre-test session, the child was asked to pick one figure representing his father even though he did not actually live in the same home. In the post-test session, the child was asked to pick a figure representing his father and his Big Brother, even though the Big Brother is not really a part of his family. Possible changes in the direction of feelings towards various members could thus be identified, as well as shifts in the psychological importance of members and the Big Brother to the child.

##### i) Reliability

The test manual states that the usual methods of assessing the reliability of a test were considered unsuitable for the Family Relations Test. However, a modified form of the split-half method was used to calculate separate reliability coefficients for each of the people in the family and in each area, regarding each score as if it were the result of a separate test. Corrected reliability coefficients ranged from .68 to .90, and indicated that the test is reasonably reliable.

##### ii) Validity

The validity of the test has been investigated from several points of view and, although the number and variety of these studies has not been large, the results justify reasonable confidence in the test (Bene & Anthony, 1957).

#### Family Level

##### The Family Interviews

Two family interviews were designed to obtain data on family dynamics and patterns of interaction that would be later observer-rated using a family assessment tool.

For both family interviews, all family members living in the home at the time were asked to participate. Both interviews consisted of seven questions which were designed to obtain data on both a content and a process level. For example, one of the questions in the pre-interview was "How do you feel about having a Big Brother involved in your family?". This was designed to determine, on a content level, members' attitudes, feelings, hopes, and expectations. The way members answered the question, such as who spoke first, who interrupted whom, who spoke the longest, and other types of dynamics, provided information about the family on a process level. Two types of family process were assessed--one type with the researcher present and participating to some degree, and the second type without the researcher present and with members interacting amongst themselves. The latter was obtained by assigning a family task requiring members to discuss options and alternatives. The researcher left the room and returned after the family had reached a consensus. The assigned task made up the first of the seven questions on both interviews. For the remaining questions, the researcher asked each one to the 'family in general,' probed responses, requested elaboration and clarification, and at times directly asked for a response from quieter members.

#### The Family Rating Scale

The videotaped family interviews were observed and rated using the Family Rating Scale designed by the researcher. This scale is a synthesis of items from three observer-rating scales: 1) the Structural-Strategic Family Assessment Scale (J. Friesen); 2) The Beavers-Timberlawn Family Evaluation Scale; and 3) The Clinical Rating Scale for the Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems (D. Olson and E. Killorin). Items were taken from each to produce a scale that would obtain a general overview and description of a family at a particular point in time (see Appendix C). The scale assesses the family along five major dimensions: family structure; affect; adaptability; communication; and cohesion.

A number of variables make up and operationalize each dimension. As an example, the 'family adaptability' dimension is assessed according to the following variables: discipline, roles, rules, and negotiation and problem-solving. Each variable is rated and assigned a number from one to five, along a continuum whose description is unique to each particular variable. For example, the variable 'rules' is on a continuum from

'unchanging rules' to 'frequent rule changes,' whereas the variable 'discipline' ranges from 'autocratic' to 'laissez-faire.' The numbers, however, are for comparison purposes only; a high or low number does not represent 'good' or 'bad,' 'healthy' or 'unhealthy.' The pattern of scores assigned to each variable provide a picture of the family at that point in time. The pre-and-post rating scales may thus be compared to determine possible changes along particular dimensions.

The entire family interviews, both pre-and-post, were observed and rated by two observers--one, the researcher, and the second, a psychologist familiar with family systems theory and research. Both observers spent some time together reviewing the rating scale and the glossary of terms to reach a common understanding of the variables. A family interview tape that was not used in the study was viewed and rated together, and discrepancies discussed. All other tapes were observed and rated independently.

#### **D. Analysis of Data**

##### **Qualitative Data**

After the pre-and-post interview sessions, a qualitative analysis of the individual and family interviews was carried out. The audiotaped personal interviews with the mothers were transcribed, and these provided data for the descriptions of family history, relationships, and changes as perceived by the mother. In addition, the transcripts provided data for the identification of common themes and experiences.

Scores obtained from the Family Rating Scales were summarized to create one picture of each family at a particular point in time. The scores for each variable and dimension were used as a framework for describing the families, and family change, in a case-study format. The actual scores are also presented in table form. Significant changes were set at a minimum two-point difference in either direction.

##### **Quantitative Data**

Test scores from the pre-and-post sessions were compared to investigate possible changes in a number of areas. The total scores obtained from the SEI, Adult Form, were compared as to the degree and direction of change in each mother's level of self-esteem. Both the total scores and the subscale scores on the SEI, School Form, were



compared to identify increases or decreases in the Little Brother's level of self-esteem in the various areas such as home and school. Scores obtained from the inventories are presented in table form.

Scores obtained from the Family Relations Test were compared to investigate shifts in the child's feelings towards family members, as well as his feelings about his Big Brother. For each boy, two areas were examined:

- the total involvement with family members, indicated by the total number of items (both positive and negative) attributed to each person. Total involvement, as outlined in the test manual, is an indication of the psychological importance of a person to the child.
- the nature of the relationship with each family member. This is indicated by the number and pattern of items attributed to each member in four major categories: outgoing positive; outgoing negative; incoming positive; and incoming negative.

Scores obtained from the test are presented in table form.



#### IV. STUDY RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

In this chapter, the results of the study are presented and interpreted. Following this, the research questions are addressed and the results outlined in terms of general patterns, themes, and experiences. Thus, data interpretation moves from the specific to the general. The chapter closes with a short discussion of interrelationships between study factors and results.

##### A. The Four Case-Studies

###### Family A

###### First Personal Interview with Mother

Family A is comprised of the mother, 38 years of age, two girls and one boy, the Little Brother. The girls are 16 and 13 years old, and the boy is the youngest at 8 years. They have an 18 year old sister who is married and living in the city. The mother is employed part-time as a receptionist, and the family's income is supplemented through social assistance. She and her ex-spouse were married for about 12 years; the physical separation, initiated by her spouse, occurred 9 years ago. Her son was only two months old at the time. They had been legally divorced for six years.

The mother described the climate of the separation as "real hairy." His desire to leave came as a shock to her and the girls, who were very upset and didn't want him to leave. After he moved out, the girls "kind of revolted." She described the dynamic as:

They figured that they should have things their way. And I guess I sort of felt sorry for them because they didn't have their dad there, and I would spoil them a bit more, and they'd get rotten. And then when I'd try to settle them down, things were really out of whack.

The family was required to make many changes. They moved to a house in another area of the city, and the children had to change schools. Prior to the separation, the mother worked in the home. After, she enrolled in a college program which took her a few years to complete. Her son went to a day-care. She thought she and the children developed a closer relationship and did more things together. She saw herself, at that time, as being more of a friend to them than a mother. After the separation, she stated, "everyone had to

grow."

The mother had found life as a single-parent to be quite different. Not only has she had more freedom--"I don't have to take guff from anybody"--but also more loneliness. Between work and family, she found little time or energy for anything else.

At the time of the first interview, she described her daughters' relationship with their father as "an acquaintance." After he left, he rarely saw the girls as it "hurt them and him too much." Shortly after, he moved to another province and there has been little contact since. She described her son and his father as "strangers." She stated that her son will occasionally talk about establishing contact with his father, and possibly visit with him, but she will tell him "you don't know him." There was some indication of ongoing anger and resentment from the mother towards her ex-spouse, in which she may unknowingly be involving her son as a pawn. When asked to describe her present relationship with her ex-spouse, she stated:

There isn't one (laughs). I think I feel sorry for him. He's paying for his jump into this great bed of roses (he's re-married), and he's not getting what he wants.

What he wants, according to the mother, is some type of relationship or contact with his children, particularly establishing one with his son. She described a recent incident which highlighted this:

They spoke on the phone last spring and (my son) asked if he could go up. I said no, you're not going to a place you don't know. There's been no communication and (my ex-spouse) expects this, and I said it wasn't feasible. He's got to make more of an effort than that, you know, seeing a person just once, it would be too much for (my son).

The mother, at the present time, saw herself changing her role with her children from being a friend and buddy back to being "the mother they need." She stated that she was "trying to give them more discipline," as this had always been a big problem. The family had recently gone for counselling for this, and she had been continuing for several months on her own.

The mother had a very good support system in the form of her family, who live nearby, and her church. She also stated that her counsellor was a strong support person

for her.

In a number of areas, her son's behavior indicated a strong need for attention. When adult men visit the home, the mother stated, "he's all over them--he is looking for a male friendship so bad." His school performance was described as "awful." His behavior in the classroom can be very disruptive:

He makes sure that everybody knows he's there, and puts up a real fuss, just can't settle down, he wants to be heard. It's as though he's looking for some kind of special attention and can't find it.

In the previous year, his behavior had been the worst ever. He also has some difficulty relating to children his own age, as he always wanted to be the leader and do things his way.

The family had been waiting for a Big Brother for about two years. The mother had originally contacted the agency because she thought, with all the females in the home, the boy needed more men in his life. She hoped a Big Brother would help him "grow up a little bit," teach him how to act like a boy, and help him gain more confidence in himself.

#### Second Personal Interview with Mother

At the time of the post-interview there had been no major changes in family circumstances. However, the mother was very quick to state:

The only major change is (my son). He's got better. He's more content, the restlessness, the 'I don't know what to do with myself' thing is going. . .he's more confident with himself, so he likes himself better.

This major improvement was thought to be due to a number of influences, including her son's Big Brother, a coordinated effort between home and school, and her efforts to be a "better mother" and praise him more. Over the six-month period her son and his Big Brother had been seeing each other regularly and going swimming, bowling, cycling, and other recreational activities. She described the influence the Big Brother had had on her son the following way:

Well, I guess just having somebody that's really special for him, and someone to take care of him. (His Big Brother) gives him a lot of special attention, they do things together. (My son) realizes that it's his friend, and they just feel as proud as punch.

Her son had not had any contact with his father during the study period. Once again, her ex-spouse had asked, 'through the grapevine,' whether his son could visit him the coming summer, and she had said no. The mother was unsure whether he was aware of the involvement of a Big Brother, as she had not had any feedback from him.

She reported small changes in her son in a number of areas. Her relationship with him had improved, but she found it hard to separate out the influence of the Big Brother and the changes she felt she had been making. He got along with his sisters "a bit better." With adult men, he was no longer so "rambunctious and restless" and did not seem so eager to get male contact, as his Big Brother provided that for him. Although he was relating to peers a little better, she still described this as a problem area for him. His school performance had improved to the point that it was possible he may pass the year, and his grades were a bit better. In the study period, his teacher and mother had begun working together to give him extra assistance, ensure he did his homework, and so on. This was likely a significant factor in his improvement. His behavior in the classroom had improved slightly, although he still seemed to need the attention and was the "class clown."

The mother stated that the relationship her son had with his Big Brother had definitely met her hopes and expectations. She felt it had given him more confidence and pride in himself, and had given him somebody to be proud of. She stated:

It's more than what I expected, really. I didn't think (my son) would accept somebody so readily. And I didn't think they would be as good friends as what they are.

#### Results of the Self-Esteem Inventories

At the pre-test the mother's level of self-esteem was in the low range, and was the lowest score, by far, of all the mothers (16 points). At the post-test her score had increased dramatically by 20 points (to 36 points), and was in the medium range. This was the largest increase of all the mothers. It is likely that her involvement in counselling, for over a year, contributed to her increased level of self-esteem, although this may not account for the sudden improvement over the previous six-month period.

The Little Brother's Total Self score, at the pre-test, was also the lowest of the five boys at 70 points. On the subscales, his General Self score was fairly low (19 points), as were his scores on the Home-Parents Scale (four points) and School-Academic Scale



(five points). His Lie Scale score was quite high (five points), particularly compared to the scores of the other boys. This may indicate some defensiveness and desire to "look good." At the post-test, his overall Total Self score had decreased by ten points. The largest decreases on the subscales were in General Self (-3 points) and School-Academic (-2 points). His score on the Home-Parents Scale increased by one point, which was the only subscale score that showed an increase. His Lie Scale score decreased by two points, which can be considered a positive sign indicating a decrease in defensiveness.

#### Results of the Family Relations Test

At the pre-test session, the Little Brother was most involved with his cousin, with a total score of 11 items. This was very unusual as, although he had a lot of contact with him, his cousin is not a family member and does not live with them. This high involvement decreased by one item at the post-test, although the pattern of involvement had shifted so that he was more involved with family members living in the home than with his cousin. The nature of the relationship was positive, with more positive feelings incoming than outgoing. Unlike other family members living in the home, he did not attribute any negative items incoming from his cousin. This may provide a clue to the psychological importance of his cousin to him at that time.

Total involvement with his mother increased by five items over the six-month period. This was the only mother (or father) whose involvement was higher at the post-session. The shift in feelings was primarily in more incoming negative items, although at both pre-and-post sessions, the relationship with his mother was experienced as mostly positive.

This child also had a high degree of involvement with his sisters, both the two in the home and with his married sister. This involvement was significantly greater at the post-session for the two living in the home (increases of 7 and 10 items). He was more involved with his 13 year old sister than with his mother, and as involved with his 16 year old sister as with his mother. At the pre-session, the nature of his relationships with his sisters was largely positive. At the post-session, however, the relationship was characterized as mostly negative incoming, and this largely made up the increased level of involvement.



Table 1  
RESULTS OF THE BENE ANTHONY FAMILY RELATIONS TEST

CHILD A

|             | OUTGOING<br>POSITIVE |      | OUTGOING<br>NEGATIVE |      | INCOMING<br>POSITIVE |      | INCOMING<br>NEGATIVE |      | TOTAL INVOLVEMENT |      |
|-------------|----------------------|------|----------------------|------|----------------------|------|----------------------|------|-------------------|------|
|             | PRE                  | POST | PRE                  | POST | PRE                  | POST | PRE                  | POST | PRE               | POST |
| MOTHER      | 2                    | 3    | 0                    | 0    | 4                    | 5    | 3                    | 6    | 9                 | 14   |
| SISTER 2    | 2                    | 2    | 0                    | 1    | 3                    | 4    | 2                    | 7    | 7                 | 14   |
| SISTER 3    | 2                    | 2    | 0                    | 3    | 3                    | 4    | 1                    | 7    | 6                 | 16   |
| SELF        | 1                    | 0    | 0                    | 0    | 1                    | 1    | 0                    | 0    | 2                 | 1    |
| SISTER 1    | 2                    | 2    | 0                    | 0    | 3                    | 5    | 3                    | 1    | 8                 | 8    |
| FATHER      | 2                    | 0    | 0                    | 3    | 2                    | 0    | 0                    | 0    | 4                 | 3    |
| COUSIN      | 3                    | 5    | 3                    | 2    | 5                    | 3    | 0                    | 0    | 11                | 10   |
| 'NOBODY'    | 2                    | 0    | 4                    | 1    | 0                    | 0    | 2                    | 1    | 8                 | 2    |
| BIG BROTHER | 4                    |      | 0                    |      | 6                    |      | 0                    |      |                   | 10   |

Of all family members, he was least involved with his father both pre-and-post, and this involvement decreased by one item over the six-month period. The nature of the relationship shifted dramatically. At the pre-test the relationship was seen as only positive, with an equal number of incoming and outgoing items. At the post-test, however, the relationship was seen as only negative, with all negative feelings outgoing. During the post-test session, he expressed his negative feelings towards his father, at one point stating "I don't hate my father, I just don't like him very much." One hypothesis for this shift may be that having a positive, adult male friend may have freed him up to express his anger towards his father. This was also indicated by his use of the 'nobody' figure. In the pre-test, he attributed a number of outgoing negative feelings to 'nobody,' indicating defensiveness. At the post-test, however, more outgoing negative items went to father and other members (except mother), than went to 'nobody.'

Child A was the most highly involved with his Big Brother (10 items) than were any of the other boys. At the post-test, he was as involved with his Big Brother as he was with his cousin. The nature of the relationship was completely positive, with more incoming than outgoing positive feelings.

#### First Family Interview

In the first family interview Family A was seen as chaotic, disorganized, and somewhat dysfunctional. In terms of family structure, the family was rated as having a limited leadership. The daughters, particularly the youngest, appeared to provide more direction and leadership than did the mother. The mother's parental control over her son was very ineffective and unsuccessful. During the interview he engaged in a number of attention-seeking behaviors which all members paid attention to but were unable to limit or control. The boundary between the parental and sibling subsystem was very diffuse and weak. The youngest daughter acted very strongly as a parental child and was the family spokesperson. The mother was very quiet and took a passive role. The 16 year old daughter looked to her younger sister to speak for her. She was, in fact, reluctant to participate in the interview, and had to be coaxed from her room.

All members interacted with the Little Brother in a negative way. His sisters yelled at him frequently, referred to him as a "brat," and the mother often pointed out his "bad" or negative behaviors. Being the youngest in a fairly large family, and the only boy, may

contribute to his position in the family being a difficult one.

Family cohesion was rated as towards the disengaged end of the continuum. Family bonding and involvement were quite low, and members seemed to spend little time with each other. Personal separateness was predominant, and the girls appeared to be separating early from the family. One hypothesis for the Little Brother's acting-out behavior could be to keep family members connected. They were very united in their efforts to get him to act properly, do his chores, and so on.

In terms of family adaptability, the family was rated as towards the chaotic end of the continuum. Discipline was seen as laissez-faire and ineffective. This was particularly so with the Little Brother, who would act out and be threatened with some punishment by the mother. He would ignore the threats and continue acting-out, and the mother made only feeble attempts to follow through with the punishment. Family roles and rules were unclear, changed frequently and, in terms of the rules, were inconsistently enforced. Attempts at negotiation and problem-solving were difficult as there were endless negotiations, possibly exacerbated by the unclear family leadership.

This sense that their family was chaotic was also alluded to by members. For example, when asked to describe the most difficult time they've had as a family, the mother stated:

When they are disagreeing amongst each other. When it's all chaotic and no harmony. This can happen quite often, depending on their moods.

The 16 year old daughter, when asked what she would change in their family, said:

I'd have it so everyone wasn't always in an uproar. Like, he (the Little Brother) wouldn't be a brat, so he's not bad so mom wouldn't have to spaz out on him.

On the family communication dimension, the family was generally rated in the mid-range. There was some degree of clarity of verbal messages, although this was not consistent across time or across all members. There were some incongruent messages, and some discussion of self, feelings, and relationships. Members made occasional invasions. The one variable that was rated lower than mid-range was 'respect and regard.' Members were seen as having a belittling and disrespectful attitude towards others' feelings and messages. This was particularly so towards the Little Brother, who spoke in a 'baby' voice, often made 'silly' statements, and was not taken seriously by any family

members. When he talked, no-one listened.

In terms of family affect, members were rated as being fairly able to directly express a wide range of feelings. Family mood and tone shifted frequently from warmth and humor to open hostility. Although there was a lot of laughter during the interview, this appeared to be a way for members to reduce the level of tension.

Dissatisfaction with the family was evident from members' responses to the family change question. The mother stated that she would:

...change their feelings towards each other, so they could love and appreciate each other as people should, and forget about selfishness.

The girls would change their brother, and he (possibly in self-defense) stated he would change them. With this degree of dissatisfaction, it is not too surprising that the girls were separating early and that the mother was somewhat withdrawn from the family, possibly feeling overwhelmed and ineffective.

#### Second Family Interview

In the second interview a number of changes in the family were noted. The mother looked much happier and more relaxed. A major change was observed in the family structure as the mother took much more of a leadership role than she did in the first interview. She directed the answering of questions, took a leadership role in the problem-solving task, and the children generally looked to her for guidance and direction. There was a clear boundary between the parental and sibling subsystem. The youngest daughter, while still being talkative, was not so much the family spokesperson. It was interesting to note that when she did speak 'for the family,' the mother challenged her on her right to do this. There was no evidence of the youngest daughter being a parental child, although it sounded as if she could be, temporarily, when the mother needed her assistance. The 16 year old was still quiet, looking to her sister to speak, but was generally more involved in the interview. The role of the Little Brother in the family had not appeared to change. He still spoke in a 'baby' voice, was ignored when he spoke, and received most of the negative interactions and statements. However, his mother did direct some positive statements to him, such as "I think he's grown up a little bit" and "I've noticed he has more confidence in himself."

In terms of the family cohesion dimension, there was little change. The family was still rated towards the disengaged end of the continuum, and the girls were still seen as separating from the family. The only variable rated differently in the second session was 'emotional bonding.' Members displayed a greater degree of emotional closeness, along with some family loyalty.

On the family adaptability dimension there were no changes observed. The family was viewed as chaotic, and this was evident in the youngest daughter's response when asked what she would change in the family:

I would have it so that everyone would listen, and we wouldn't have to scream and shout, and you could talk, like talk on the phone, and have peace and quiet.

The mother still appeared ineffective in her discipline and control of her son, who engaged in 'silly' and attention-seeking behaviors. Her ineffective discipline style was highlighted by the youngest daughter, who stated:

(The Little Brother) has to be told 40 times. Like, he gets threatened with things, like if you don't do this, you can't have this, or go there, and sometimes he does do them, and sometimes he doesn't do them.

During the interview, the mother did not follow through on any of her threatened consequences.

There were some changes noted in the family's communication styles. Members were rated as being more open in their discussion of self, feelings, and relationships than in the first interview. In the other direction, however, there were more invasions between members.

Variables on the family affect dimension were rated the same as in the first interview. The family's mood and tone, however, was somewhat more warm and affectionate. There seemed to be more genuine humor, laughter, and fun in each other's company. However, as there was still overt hostility, mostly directed at the Little Brother, the overall score remained the same.

Dissatisfaction with the family was evident from the members' responses to the family change question. The mother again stated that she would change the children's feelings for each other so there "would be more attention and care for each other, without being so selfish of their concerns." The daughters wanted a change in the



atmosphere in the home so they could bring friends over without being embarrassed by their mother "freaking out" and "screaming and shouting" at their brother. The change the Little Brother wanted was:

Her move (pointed to one sister), her move (pointed to the other sister), and me.

When asked about possible disadvantages of having a Big Brother, the youngest daughter pointed out a potentially difficult situation that the Big Brother may be facing.

(My brother) knowing that he has him, well I can't really say it's a disadvantage to us, but to him (the Big Brother). Like he'll phone (his Big Brother) every five minutes and talk to him all the time, and ask him some simple question. And when he's around (my brother) kind of shows off and that, and it embarrasses us, and it can also embarrass him too.

The boy's childish and uncontrolled behavior, which serves a purpose and is maintained in the context of his family, may present overwhelming behavior problems to the Big Brother. In his relationship to the boy, he may have to limit and control the boy's behavior in order to develop a mutually satisfying relationship. Whether the Big Brother has the maturity and skills to do this, or even wishes to do this, is uncertain.

## Family B

### First Personal Interview with Mother

Family B is comprised of the mother, 40 years of age, and two boys, aged 12 and 10 years. The mother works full-time as a receptionist. She and her ex-spouse were married for about 14 years, and lived in another province. They separated, at the initiative of her spouse, five years ago. Their children were about seven and five years old at the time. They had been divorced for about two years.

She described the climate of the separation as "friendly." Although she was upset, particularly as it happened very suddenly, she stated: "there was no fighting, because we never fought." During the marriage she had worked in the home. After the separation, however, she took on two jobs and the children went to a babysitter. At that time, she didn't want to have too much to do with the boys because she needed some time "to get her bearings." Their father saw them frequently and looked after them when she was

working and the sitter was unavailable.

After six months, she and the boys moved to Edmonton where the mother had grown up and her family, and many friends, still lived. She stated that her younger son was too young to understand the separation and move. Her older son was sad, but after the move "it didn't seem to faze him." She thought that the boys had adjusted very well to the separation because, after the move, "they just sort of didn't talk about him and just sort of forgot." However, when their father came to visit them the occasional weekends, the older boy would often get upset and phone his mother late at night, asking to come home because he didn't feel well. After some time, he seemed to adjust.

The mother found life as a single-parent to be quite different. Not only did she have to go out and be the bread-winner, but there was no adult to converse and share things with. She noted that, some time after the separation, she and the boys grew closer together.

The mother described her present relationship with her ex-spouse as "very good." She stated that they have always been on good terms, and when he is in town he will often have dinner with them. As she explained, "he and I tolerate each other, and things are fine." The boys see their father twice a year, for a total of 44 days, usually for the summer and once in the fall. They also write letters to each other on occasion. The mother believes they have a pretty good relationship with their father, although they still don't talk much about him.

She believed her present relationship to her children to be "fairly good." She stated: "if there's something bothering them, they'll tell me, and if there's something bothering me, I'll tell them." At times, she finds her younger son hard to handle.

The mother appeared to have a very solid support system in the form of her family and her ex-spouse's family, whom she is quite close to. She has a sister who lives a block away, and who is "always there" if she needs anything.

Both boys relate well to children their own age, as well as to adult men. Her younger son

craves male attention, because somebody will come over and he's right there, sitting up shoulder to shoulder with them, or sitting on their knee.

Both do very well in school, usually earning 'A's' and 'B's,' and neither is a behavior

problem in the classroom.

The mother contacted the Big Brother agency because she wanted them to have an on-going, adult male relationship so they could "do things together, male to male." Even their father had thought this would be a good idea. They had been waiting for two Big Brothers for about a year and a half.

#### Second Personal Interview with Mother

During the six-month study period there had been no major changes for Family B. The mother described her younger son's relationship with his Big Brother as:

just great. He sort of shines when he's around him. They get along like a house on fire, and (my son is) always glad to see him, and he phones his Big Brother and (his Big Brother) phones this way. It's worked out really well.

They had been seeing each other regularly over the period of this study. In addition to the usual recreational activities and movies, the Big Brother had introduced her son to a new hobby, and was planning to teach him how to hang-glide.

Her older son, however, had a completely different relationship. She described his relationship with his Big Brother as "he doesn't appear to have one." Although he met his Big Brother around the same time his younger brother met his, they had gone out together only six or seven times during the six months. At the time of the second interview, he had not heard from the Big Brother for about two months. Even when they were seeing each other, her son always had to phone him, and then a few days later he would usually take him out somewhere. There was no consistency to their contact, and usually a few weeks would go by until her son again phoned the Big Brother. The mother stated that his Big Brother had been having family problems since the start of their relationship and, over time, these and other difficulties he was having just seemed to "take over." She related one incident where the Big Brother was at their home, intending to spend some time with her son. He spent more time with her, however, talking about his marriage problems. The last they had heard from him, he and his wife had separated and he had moved, leaving no forwarding phone number or address. The mother stated that their relationship had just "never got off the ground."

She stated, however, that her son did not blame himself for the lack of relationship. Early on he wondered why he always had to do the phoning, but once he

found out his Big Brother was having family problems "he sort of passed it off." She said that, if he did feel badly about it, he didn't show it. She reported that he did not display any jealousy or resentment towards his brother.

The boys had about the same amount of contact with their father as they'd typically had. In the six-month period they spend a weekend with him when he was in town. Letter writing had increased, however; four letters written back and forth "was more than there has been in six years." The older son was planning to spend the coming summer with his father, but the younger boy was undecided as to whether he would go, in case it interfered with a two-day rafting trip he and his Big Brother were hoping to take. The mother, who was much more open and willing to discuss the boys' feelings for their dad, stated:

Well, he doesn't think too much of his dad, from different things he says about him, so I guess it doesn't really matter to him whether he goes up there or not.

She added that her older son shares the same views about his father, and only goes to visit him to see an old friend.

She stated that the only change in her relationship with her sons was that now they had more to talk about:

They're doing different things, when they're out with them, so then they come home they're all enthused, and we sit down and talk about what they did, so it's something different for conversation other than the old hum-drum, what went on at school and day-care, and that's about it.

She had noticed that her younger son enjoyed the male companionship that his Big Brother provided, and that when other adult men came to the house he wasn't "hanging around" quite as much, trying to sit on their knee. Both boys still related well with peers. She described their school behavior and performance as "super," although her older son's performance in one subject had decreased dramatically "because he wasn't really applying himself." He had since improved.

The mother stated that, for her, having two adult men involved in her family had been "great." She went on to add

It relieves me of some time. . .like I say the kids are always glad to do



something with someone else other than me.

The relationship her younger son had with his Big Brother had met her hopes and expectations because he is happy when his Big Brother is around and is able to do things that "guys" do. Needless to say, this hasn't been the case for her older son. She thought he would be better off with another Big Brother, and summed it up by saying "he just wants someone that would take him fishing."

#### Results of the Self-Esteem Inventories

At the pre-test, the mother's level of self-esteem was in the high range (84 points). At the post-test, her score had increased by four points, and was the highest score of all the mothers.

The two boys, on the pre-test, had the same level of self-esteem (96 points), which were the highest scores of all the boys in the sample. Subscale scores indicated high levels in all areas. Lie Scale scores were low. At the post-test session the older boy's score increased by four points, and the younger boy's score decreased by six points. The older boy's increased score was in the General Self and Social Self-Peers subscales, while the younger boy's decreased score was reflected in lower subscale scores in General Self and School-Academic. Lie Scale scores for both remained the same pre and post.

#### Results of the Family Relations Test

At the pre-test, the older boy's pattern of involvement with his mother and father was exactly equal. He was very careful about attributing the same items, both positive and negative, to each of them. At the post-test session, however, total involvement with the father had decreased by six items and only by one item with the mother. The nature of the relationship with both, pre-and-post, was largely positive.

The involvement with his brother was quite high at both sessions and, in fact, increased by one item at the post-session. The relationship was largely characterized as negative. The most dramatic shift was the increase in negative items outgoing at the post-session, accompanied by fewer positive items, both outgoing and incoming. This change may reflect some resentment and hostility towards his brother due to the major difference in their Big Brother relationships.



Table 2  
RESULTS OF THE BENE ANTHONY FAMILY RELATIONS TEST

CHILD B1

|             | OUTGOING<br>POSITIVE |      | OUTGOING<br>NEGATIVE |      | INCOMING<br>POSITIVE |      | INCOMING<br>NEGATIVE |      | TOTAL INVOLVEMENT |      |
|-------------|----------------------|------|----------------------|------|----------------------|------|----------------------|------|-------------------|------|
|             | PRE                  | POST | PRE                  | POST | PRE                  | POST | PRE                  | POST | PRE               | POST |
| MOTHER      | 6                    | 6    | 1                    | 0    | 7                    | 7    | 6                    | 6    | 20                | 19   |
| BROTHER     | 2                    | 1    | 5                    | 8    | 3                    | 2    | 4                    | 4    | 14                | 15   |
| SELF        | 0                    | 1    | 0                    | 0    | 1                    | 0    | 0                    | 0    | 1                 | 1    |
| FATHER      | 6                    | 4    | 1                    | 0    | 7                    | 6    | 6                    | 4    | 20                | 14   |
| 'NOBODY'    | 0                    | 0    | 3                    | 0    | 0                    | 0    | 1                    | 0    | 4                 | 0    |
| BIG BROTHER | 0                    | 0    | 0                    | 0    | 1                    | 1    | 0                    | 0    |                   | 1    |

Table 3

## RESULTS OF THE BENE ANTHONY FAMILY RELATIONS TEST

CHILD B2

|             | OUTGOING<br>POSITIVE |      | OUTGOING<br>NEGATIVE |      | INCOMING<br>POSITIVE |      | INCOMING<br>NEGATIVE |      | TOTAL INVOLVEMENT |      |
|-------------|----------------------|------|----------------------|------|----------------------|------|----------------------|------|-------------------|------|
|             | PRE                  | POST | PRE                  | POST | PRE                  | POST | PRE                  | POST | PRE               | POST |
| MOTHER      | 4                    | 4    | 0                    | 0    | 6                    | 6    | 4                    | 3    | 14                | 13   |
| BROTHER     | 2                    | 1    | 8                    | 8    | 1                    | 2    | 4                    | 4    | 15                | 15   |
| SELF        | 2                    | 0    | 0                    | 0    | 0                    | 1    | 0                    | 0    | 2                 | 1    |
| FATHER      | 4                    | 1    | 0                    | 0    | 4                    | 2    | 3                    | 0    | 11                | 3    |
| 'NOBODY'    | 1                    | 3    | 0                    | 0    | 2                    | 0    | 0                    | 1    | 3                 | 4    |
| BIG BROTHER | 1                    |      | 0                    |      | 3                    |      | 0                    |      |                   | 4    |

Total involvement with the Big Brother was the lowest for all boys, at one item. This was not too surprising as he felt he didn't really have a Big Brother. Despite this, the one item he attributed to the Big Brother was a positive incoming item.

At both the pre-and-post sessions, the younger boy was the most highly involved with his brother (15 items). The nature of the relationship was largely negative, with twice as many outgoing as incoming negative items. The brother was, in fact, the only person assigned any negative outgoing items.

Total involvement with his mother decreased by one item. The nature of the relationship was largely positive, with more incoming than outgoing items. Total involvement with the father decreased significantly by eight items. At both sessions, the nature of the relationship was largely positive. At the post-test, however, there were fewer outgoing and incoming positive items attributed to the father.

Total involvement with the Big Brother was four items, one item higher than the involvement with the father at the post-test. The nature of the relationship was positive, with more incoming than outgoing items.

#### First Family Interview

In the first interview, Family B was seen as a stable, established family that was generally well-functioning. The tone of the family was subdued, with a sense of loss. Members seemed supportive of each other and satisfied with the family. When asked what they would change in the family, the mother and older son said they wouldn't change anything. The mother was the definite family leader and spokesperson, although hers was a 'cooperative' leadership style. There was a clear boundary between the parental and sibling subsystem. The mother and younger son seemed very close; he looked to her when asked a question and, at times, she spoke for him and supplied him with details. On occasion his statements were off-topic and irrelevant, and he seemed to have difficulty speaking for himself. There was, however, no evidence of an overinvolved mother-son relationship; rather, he seemed to be treated, and acted, like the 'baby' of the family. The older boy seemed quite mature for his age. Both boys were well-behaved and pleasant during the interview. They appeared to have a close relationship with each other, which included the usual sibling rivalry.

In terms of family cohesion, the family was rated as 'connected' on most variables. Members were involved and connected with each other, but personal distance seemed to be allowed. There was a fair degree of emotional closeness and family loyalty. The family engaged in some activities together, although separate interests, friends, and recreation seemed to be allowed. Members had clear personal boundaries. The one variable rated more toward the disengaged end of the continuum was 'family boundaries.' As may be typical of many single-parent families, boundaries were fairly open to influences from outside the family.

On the family adaptability dimension, the family was rated as 'flexible' on all variables. The mother's discipline style was seen as democratic. Roles and rules could be changed when needed, and rules were flexibly enforced. Negotiations were flexible and decisions agreed-upon by all members.

In terms of family communication, members were seen to express themselves fairly clearly and congruently. They also seemed free to discuss themselves, feelings, and relationships. For example, all stated, in their own words, that the most difficult time for them was the physical separation. There were occasional invasions between members, particularly the mother 'speaking for' her youngest son. Members were rated as appearing fairly respectful of others' feelings and messages.

On the family affect dimension, members were able to directly express a wide range of feelings. The mood and tone of the family was quite warm, affectionate, and optimistic, with some sense of loss. This loss was highlighted when the mother talked fondly of some good times they had together when her ex-spouse was still with them. There appeared to be little unresolvable conflict.

#### Second Family Interview

At the time of the second interview there were few changes observed in the family's functioning and style of interaction, despite the significantly different relationships each of the boys had with their Big Brothers. The potential for a negative impact on the older boy, whose Big Brother had not contacted him for two months prior to the interview, was great. However, this did not appear to happen to the extent that it could, probably due to his maturity, the extra support he seemed to receive from his mother, and his fairly stable and well-functioning family. During the interview, however, he



sat slumped over, his head often in his hands, and said very little. There seemed to be a closeness between him and his mother, and she appeared to be trying to make him feel more comfortable, loved, and supported. She sat very close to him, occasionally touched his hair, looked to him frequently, and often asked him for his opinion. The younger boy seemed to act more his own age, spoke easily and readily, and did not look to his mother to help him. There appeared to be some friction between the boys. On a number of occasions the older snapped at the younger, and the younger seemed to 'rub in' the fact that his Big Brother had worked out well. All reported that there had been a fair bit of fighting between the two of them.

There appeared to be no change in family structure. The mother still acted as the democratic leader, and the boundary between parental and sibling subsystems was clear. Variables on the family adaptability dimension were again generally rated as 'flexible.' The one exception was 'time,' which was rated more toward the disengaged end of the continuum. Members were spending more time outside the home due to seasonal activities such as soccer.

There were no changes observed on the variables making up the family adaptability dimension. Members still appeared connected, with separate friends and activities allowed. Members seemed involved with each other and emotionally close.

On the family communication dimension, some small changes were noted. The degree of clarity was not quite as high as in the first interview, and there were more incongruent messages. This was particularly evident for the older boy, whose verbal messages contradicted his non-verbal body posture and gestures. Members made fewer invasions in their communication, most notably as the younger boy was speaking for himself. Members were rated as having a slightly lower degree of respect for others' feelings and messages. This was most evident between the boys.

On the family affect dimension, the range of feelings expressed by members was rated as slightly lower than in the first interview. This was particularly so for the older boy, who found it very difficult to talk about his unhappiness and disappointment, so apparent non-verbally, that his Big Brother hadn't worked out. For example, when the family was asked whether having a Big Brother was what they had hoped and expected it to be, or was in some way different, the following interaction took place:

younger son: (looks to his brother and laughs) For him it is. (different than he thought it would be)

mother: What about you?

younger son: It's fun.

older son: (sits with arms crossed and shrugs) I can't say much.

younger son: Ya, he can't say very much.

older son: It wasn't really what I expected with my Big Brother. He didn't phone or come around or anything. That's all. He never phoned, he never hardly came over.

How would he like it to be?

That he would phone and come over more often. That's about all.

### Family C

#### First Personal Interview with Mother

Family C is comprised of the mother, aged 31 years, a girl 12 years of age, and a boy (the Little Brother), who is 10. The mother works full-time at a grocery store. She and her ex-spouse were married for four years; the physical separation took place about eight years ago. Her son was about 1 1/2 years old at the time. They had been divorced for five years. Prior to the separation, the mother stated that she and her husband were constantly fighting--"I don't even know how I lasted the four years." She described the marriage as "really bad."

The climate of the separation, according to the mother, was "very violent." After her husband left the home, he threatened, and attempted, to "wreck all the stuff he had bought." Confrontations between them, involving the police and observed by the children, occurred. That time was very upsetting for the children. She described one incident where her ex-spouse:

...came on (my daughter's) birthday and took the TV, him and two other friends. Just really bad, bad vibes then.

She stated that the children were aware of what was going on, cried a lot, but managed to get through it. Her son became very dependent on her, "like a leech," and that lasted for about two years. She stated that "I think he didn't want to lose me too."

After the separation, the family went on social assistance as the mother was unable to find a permanent job and the children were young and would require costly babysitters. She described life on welfare as a "dead-end street," and stated that she had been very depressed during that time.

It was very frustrating being on welfare, and I'll never go back to it. I'd just as soon marry for money than go back to it.

Only when she obtained her present job, about four years ago, was she able to financially support the family on her own. The family remained in the same house for about two years after the separation so the children could continue at the same school and keep their friends. Other than her life being financially more difficult, she reported that becoming a single-parent was not very different for her because she "always did everything anyway" as her spouse was not at home very often. The father did not see his children after the separation, and shortly thereafter moved to another province.

At the time of the first interview, the mother stated that she had "no" relationship with her ex-spouse. There was some evidence of ongoing resentment and battles between them, particularly around the issue of money. He has never sent her child support, although he is required to by law. On occasion, she will call him "when she gets mad," and ask or demand that he send them some money. He will sometimes send a bit of money after this, and other times tell her he will, but doesn't follow through. This issue may also have contaminated the children's feelings towards their father. For example, when asked to describe their relationship to their father, the mother stated:

... well, they want him to send that money because they're old enough that they realize that money is what we need to survive, and they want him to send the money, but what are we going to do about it?

The children have had no contact with their father since the separation. According to the mother, "they don't have any relationship whatsoever, they don't care if they ever see him again." It was difficult to separate the mother's overt resentment from her descriptions of her children and their father, and it seemed quite likely that the children had adopted many of her feelings towards her ex-spouse. For example, she related a recent conversation in which her son said to her "(my father's) past history to us, mom, eh?". Her response was:

Ya. Which is true. They don't give a care, which is good. Cause he hurt them so bad, and they still remember that. They'll never forgive him for that (for leaving), I don't think.

The family appeared to have a very solid support system in the form of extended family. The mother's parents, sisters, and brothers live nearby. Her sister also works with her in the same grocery store. Her parents seemed to take a very strong role in the raising of her children.

The mother stated that her son gets along well with adult men and peers. In school, however, he has always had some difficulties, and was required to repeat a grade. Reading, in particular, had been a problem area for him. Unlike his sister, who does her homework every night, his mother reported that he would rather be out skating or playing hockey.

It was her son's idea to contact the Big Brother agency as he wanted a Big Brother to do things with. She had thought it would be a good idea because "he needs somebody that's going to be regularly there." She hoped he would get a "male's point of view," and have a buddy that he could talk to about "boy stuff." The family had waited about 14 months for a Big Brother.

#### Second Personal Interview with Mother

At the time of the post-interview a major change had occurred in Family C. The mother had been terminated from her job, and she had gone to the union to fight on her behalf. She had finally been offered, and accepted, a position at another store, but she found the new job to be "terribly boring" and with lower pay. For two months prior to obtaining the job, the family's income was supplemented, once again, by social assistance. This, apart from the blow to the mother's pride, set the family back quite a bit financially. Although she had been working full-time for about a month prior to the second interview, she was still behind on bill payments and so on.

The mother described her son's relationship with his Big Brother as "great." They had been getting together regularly twice a week and were playing a lot of sports. The mother stated:

He's really nice, I'm really happy with him taking (my son) and doing things together. It hasn't cost me anything!



During the six-month period, the mother reported that her son had been getting into some serious trouble involving setting a fire and stealing from a family member. She was quick to add that "it's not because of his Big Brother or anything," and that she didn't know why he had started doing these "bad" things. However, the Big Brother-Little Brother relationship had been influenced by the difficulties in the family in a number of ways. For his misbehavior, she had grounded her son, and he was not allowed to see his Big Brother for a month or two. Also, the mother had talked to the Big Brother about problems she had been having with her son, and had asked him to speak to her son about them. When asked to elaborate on what kind of help the Big Brother was to her, she stated:

(He will) influence him, like I told him that (my son) wasn't coming home and I didn't know where he was after school, and I think he told him that he should listen to me and come home, and things like that, so that's good, and (my son) respects (his Big Brother) enough to do that for him.

Finally, the mother used his feelings for his Big Brother to covertly threaten him in the home. For example, after the fire-setting incident, she told her son that his Big Brother wouldn't trust him as much because he had obtained the matches while on an outing with his Big Brother. The mother laughingly stated that "him (the Big Brother) and my brother are the two men I use to threaten him with."

Over the six-month period there had been no contact between her son and his father. Her ex-spouse had been in town for a few days and had called to ask her if the children wanted to see him. Both said 'no,' without any hesitation. She had gone to talk to him, however, to ask him for some money. This had been unsuccessful and she was again thinking of taking him to court to obtain child support. She reported that he was unaware that his son had a Big Brother.

According to the mother, her son's relationship with his Big Brother had not influenced family relationships in any way. There had been no change in his relating to adult men or to peers. His school performance had, however, improved quite a bit. His grades were better than they were before, and his mother attributed this mostly to the influence of his Big Brother:

So I think (his Big Brother) must be helping him realize, or feel better about himself, or something, that he's trying a little bit harder. And I don't get the



notes like I did before on the report cards, you know, (my son) is talking in class.

Not only did she see him as trying harder in school, but he had also been wanting to read more, and had begun reading at home for pleasure.

#### Results of the Self-Esteem Inventories

At the pre-test the mother's level of self-esteem was in the high range and was, in fact, the highest score of all the mothers (88 points). At the post-test her score had decreased slightly by four points. This was the only score of all the mothers that had decreased. Item analysis indicated that the decrease was due to dissatisfaction in two areas: the first, with her job; and the second, feeling that her family expected too much of her. It is not too surprising that losing her job and again receiving social assistance would affect her level of self-esteem.

For her son, at the pre-test his Total Self score was fairly high, at 82 points. On the subscales, his scores were generally high in all areas, and his Lie Scale score was quite low. At the post-test, his Total Self score decreased by six points. The decrease took place primarily on the General Self subscale, with a decrease of one point indicated on the Home-Parents subscale. An increase of one point was shown on the Social Self-Peers subscale, which was the only area that had increased.

#### Results of the Family Relations Test

At the pre-test, the boy's pattern of involvement with family members was fairly typical: highest involvement with his mother, followed by a lesser degree of involvement with his sister, then father. At the post-test, this pattern had shifted to highest involvement with mother, followed by the Big Brother, father, and sister.

Total involvement with his mother decreased slightly by two items over the six-month period. The nature of the relationship at both sessions was largely positive, with approximately equal incoming and outgoing positive items. No outgoing negative items were attributed to the mother.

Total involvement with his sister had decreased by six items at the post-test session. The nature of the relationship had also shifted from one that was largely positive, to one characterized as equally positive and negative.

Table 4

## RESULTS OF THE BENE ANTHONY FAMILY RELATIONS TEST

CHILD C

|             | OUTGOING<br>POSITIVE |      | OUTGOING<br>NEGATIVE |      | INCOMING<br>POSITIVE |      | INCOMING<br>NEGATIVE |      | TOTAL INVOLVEMENT |      |
|-------------|----------------------|------|----------------------|------|----------------------|------|----------------------|------|-------------------|------|
|             | PRE                  | POST | PRE                  | POST | PRE                  | POST | PRE                  | POST | PRE               | POST |
| MOTHER      | 6                    | 6    | 0                    | 0    | 6                    | 5    | 5                    | 4    | 17                | 15   |
| SISTER      | 2                    | 1    | 2                    | 0    | 4                    | 0    | 0                    | 1    | 8                 | 2    |
| SELF        | 1                    | 0    | 0                    | 0    | 0                    | 0    | 0                    | 0    | 1                 | 0    |
| FATHER      | 1                    | 0    | 3                    | 2    | 0                    | 0    | 2                    | 1    | 6                 | 3    |
| "NOBODY"    | 0                    | 0    | 3                    | 6    | 0                    | 0    | 1                    | 2    | 4                 | 8    |
| BIG BROTHER | 2                    |      | 0                    |      |                      | 5    |                      | 0    |                   | 7    |

In terms of his relationship with his father, total involvement decreased by three items. The nature of the relationship as negative, with slightly more outgoing than incoming negative feelings, stayed the same. At both sessions, no incoming positive items were attributed to the father.

At the post-test, his use of the 'nobody' figure had increased significantly. Many more negative items were attributed to 'nobody,' particularly those that were negative outgoing. This was the only figure, other than father, to which he claimed any negative feelings towards.

Total involvement with his Big Brother at the post-test was greater than that with his sister and father (seven items). The nature of the relationship was completely positive, with more positive items incoming than outgoing.

#### First Family Interview

In the first interview, Family C was seen as a fairly solid, well-functioning family. The mother appeared mildly depressed, and sighed frequently during the interview. They seemed to be a family that had 'paid its dues.' They had struggled together through early years on social assistance, the mother had been working at a job with long and changing hours for some time, and there was little time or energy left for fun and frivolity. This was evident when the mother was asked what had been the most enjoyable time for the family, and she replied, after some time, "I can't think of any." During the interview, both children were well-behaved, pleasant, and cooperative.

In terms of family structure, the family was rated as having a 'cooperative' leadership style, and the mother was the definite leader. There was a clear boundary between the parental and sibling subsystems. The mother and daughter seemed to have a close relationship based on gender and common interests. This difference of interests was evident in the mother's response to what she hoped would happen with the involvement of a Big Brother:

That he'll have somebody who's going to be a good male influence on him. Like it's just (my daughter) and I, and he knows how to put make-up on (laughs)--he does, he knows how to clean house, do the dishes. He doesn't know male things, like fishing, mechanical things. Someone he can talk to and trust, somebody who will be there for him. . . .He doesn't have anyone to turn to.

(My daughter) has me, but he's a male, and I'm sure there's things he would rather discuss with a male.

At times, their closeness may have excluded her son, but this was not seen as an ongoing, overinvolved relationship.

On the family cohesion dimension, the family was rated towards the disengaged end of the continuum on most variables. Family involvement and bonding was quite low, and members seemed to 'go their own way' in terms of friends, interests, and recreation. They seemed to spend little time together, and this was directly stated by the mother, who said "actually, we don't do that many things as a whole." Both children appeared quite independent for their ages.

In terms of family adaptability, the family was generally rated as 'flexible.' The mother's discipline style was seen as democratic, with negotiated consequences. Roles were flexible and could be changed. Family rules appeared to be flexibly enforced. Negotiation and problem-solving was rated as flexible, with agreed-upon decisions.

On the family communication dimension, 'clarity of expression' was rated as quite clear and generally congruent. There was fairly open discussion of self, feelings, and relationships. For example, when asked about their most difficult time together as a family, members quite freely talked about the "rough" years after the physical separation. Occasional invasions were observed. Members were somewhat respectful of others, but this was not consistent across time or across all members.

On the family affect dimension, the family was rated as fairly direct in their expression of a wide range of feelings. The mood and tone of the family was warm, humorous, and affectionate. In the family, there was a nice balance between humor, respect, and openness. There appeared to be little unresolvable conflict.

#### Second Family Interview

In this interview the family did not seem to be functioning quite as well as at the time of the first interview. The mother-daughter relationship was particularly tense and conflict-ridden. Over the six-month period the daughter had matured considerably, and she was openly challenging her mother's opinions. The daughter was quite animated and talkative, and openly expressed her dissatisfaction with the family. For example, when asked what she would change about the family, she stated "I just want everybody to be



happy and not fight anymore." After the interview had ended, she told everyone that what she had really wanted to say was "that we each move out and live on our own." It seemed that the functioning of the family had decreased while members adjusted to the developmental changes of a maturing adolescent. The mother seemed more depressed than in the first interview. The challenges of her daughter, as well as the change of jobs, seemed to have taken their toll on her sense of hope and optimism. She appeared to have little energy to negotiate the required changes in the mother-daughter relationship at that time. Her son was very relaxed during the interview and seemed to be able to keep himself apart from the tension between mother and daughter. However, his recent misbehavior may indicate that he had been feeling and reacting to the increased conflicts and frustrations in the family.

In terms of family structure, the mother's leadership style was rated as towards the limited/erratic end of the continuum. The mother seemed to have little energy to act as leader or successfully exert her parental control. There was still a clear boundary between the parental and sibling subsystems.

On the family cohesion dimension, most variables were still rated towards the disengaged end, and some even more so than in the first interview. The family seemed to spend even less time together on common interests and recreation. Family boundaries appeared to be more open to influences from outside the family.

In terms of family adaptability, two small changes were observed. The mother's discipline style appeared more laissez-faire and inconsistent. This was highlighted in the following interaction, when members were asked how they manage to work together as a family:

mother: Well, when they know what has to be done, they do it and it's done. Like with the dishes. Nobody thinks they need to be done right away, so I leave it two or three days, and they do it, even if it takes an hour on the third day. I'm not one of those people who insist on a sterilized, clean house every day. Maybe that's not right, but at least the kids know it has to be done. (I leave the chores) until they do it, or it drives me bananas.

daughter: Which is usually the second day. (sarcastically imitating her mother):

'Do the dishes!', 'Vacuum!', 'You're not getting your allowance until you do the dishes!'

(mother and daughter argue over allowances)

son: This is what goes on every day.

Also, family rules appeared to change more frequently and be inconsistently enforced.

One change was noted on the family communication dimension. In terms of clarity of expression, members were rated as having some degree of clarity, but this was not consistent across time or across all members. One example of this was evident in the continuation of the previous interaction.

daughter: I have to fight with everybody in the house every day.

mother: But you have to have your chores, though.

daughter: Usually it's not about chores most of the time.

mother: Well, what's it about then?

daughter: Everything else.

mother: Like what?

daughter: Like everything.

son: Ok, let's go on.

On the family affect dimension, changes were noted on all variables. Obvious restrictions in the expression of some feelings were observed. Family mood and tone was rated as overtly hostile. This was particularly so between brother and sister, whom all agreed "hate each other." The family was seen as having definite conflict, with some impairment of group functioning.

During the interview, the mother stated that the relationship her son had with his Big Brother had definitely met her hopes and expectations.

I'm really happy with (his Big Brother). I think he's a really good Big Brother for (my son). And I like him because he does things with (my son), takes him out . . . cause I really don't have the time or the patience to do things like that. I think it's even better (than I thought it would be). Well, I think they're quite a bit closer than I thought it would be. So that's good.

## Family D

### First Personal Interview with Mother

Family D is comprised of the mother, aged 35, a boy (the Little Brother), 12 years of age, and a girl, 9 years old. The mother works full-time as a salesperson. She and her ex-spouse were married for about 10 years. The physical separation occurred about four years ago, when her son was about eight years old. They had been legally divorced for two years.

The climate of the separation, which had been initiated by her spouse, was described by the mother as "awful." He left the home and, for a number of weeks she didn't know where he was or why he had left. She told the children he was out of town on business, though herself believing he was having some sort of breakdown. Finally, one night

...his girlfriend pushed him into the house and he said 'I want a divorce.' (My son) was standing right beside me, and he went screaming out of the house. It was chaos after chaos.

He told his son that he was finding a place of his own and would come and get him later, presumably to move in with him. However, he never came to get him.

After the separation, few major physical changes were made. The mother had previously been working at her job part-time, and she then started as a full-time employee. They were able to stay in the family home, which was a priority to the mother. She did not find her life too different as a single-parent, although she stated "I'm so tired I don't have time for anything." Her son's school performance dropped dramatically. She and the children went for counselling, which seemed to help at the time. She felt, however, that he had never really accepted the divorce, and still wants both of them together. After the separation, the children stayed with their father every second week-end. About a year ago he and his second wife moved to the U.S.

• She described her present relationship with her ex-spouse as "there is no relationship." She had not spoken to him in over two years as his new wife wouldn't let her. The disruption of the separation and feelings of resentment and bitterness still seemed alive in her relationship with her son. He blamed her for his father moving away and rarely phoning them. She reported that they had been going for counselling "because

we don't get along too well." She described their difficulty as a discipline problem, which was largely her fault as she was inconsistent in enforcing punishment. Ever since the separation her son had told her that he wanted to live with his father. The children stayed with him the previous summer, and her son believed he would move in with his father. After a few weeks into September, however, he phoned his mother and asked if he could please come home. She stated she didn't know why he had changed his mind because they had never talked about it. Since then he had never told her he would rather live with his father.

Despite the great distance between the mother and father, and the lack of direct contact, minor issues had arisen which had involved both their son and the father's second wife. The mother related one incident which took place during the summer that her son had 'moved in' with his father. His new wife had told the mother that they would no longer be sending her child support, and the mother had threatened to take them to court. When her son later phoned to ask to come home, he pleaded with her--"Please don't take my dad to court, promise me you won't take my dad to court." The money issue may have been one factor influencing her son to come back home.

The mother was unsure what type of relationship the children had with their father, although when he was living nearby and seeing them every second weekend, it was "take them out here and there and buy, buy, buy." The summer visit had been their only personal contact with him since he moved away, and she didn't know when, if ever, they would visit him again. Her daughter occasionally wrote him letters, but her son had never written him.

The mother's support system did not seem quite as solid or extensive as those of the other study families. She had one or two relatives living in the city, but most of her family lived some distance away. She had been involved with a man and his children for over two years, and this had been a major support for her. They had, however, just recently parted.

The mother reported that her son related well with adult men and peers, although he had no close or "best" friends. His school performance, to that point, had been fine, although she described his previous year as his "worst year ever." Not only were his grades very low, but he had also been the "class clown." She stated that "he liked the attention, and he got it."



The mother had contacted the Big Brother agency because she thought her son needed someone, his own male friend, that he could do things with that she couldn't do. They only had to wait a few months before a suitable Big Brother was available.

#### Second Personal Interview with Mother

Over the six-month period there had been a number of changes for Family D. The mother had recently left her job and, although she was anxious about what to do next, she generally saw it as a positive move, a "time out" from the stress and frustration of a job she had never enjoyed. She was considering going back to school after a few months. She and her boyfriend had been seeing each other, although they had again just parted. She thought her children may have been disappointed that the relationship hadn't worked out. Her son had been attending a group for children of divorce at his school, and the mother thought this may have "opened his eyes a little bit" to the fact that he's not the only one that has had to face difficult situations.

Her son had been matched with two Big Brothers over the study period. Shortly after the pre-test session he had met his first Big Brother. They went out for one afternoon, and then he never heard from him. After some time, the mother phoned the Big Brother agency and learned that he had been transferred to another province for his job. She explained that to her son, and told him it wasn't his fault. She thought he felt quite rejected, despite her reassurances. She noted that, shortly after:

He was a real little shit there for a while. His schoolwork, just everything went down. At school he wasn't doing his homework and he wasn't studying, he had a terrible report card.

She first noticed this drop in his school performance on his December report card, on which his grades had really gone down and he was failing some subjects. His teacher told her that he may have to repeat the year if his grades didn't improve.

While they were waiting to be re-matched, he told her a number of times "Maybe I don't need a Big Brother." She recalled the day they were driving to the agency to meet the second Big Brother, and he kept saying "Oh, I don't need a Big Brother." After they met, however, they discovered they had much in common. The mother stated:

I know that (my son) really likes him, cause he's talking about him all the time. The second Big Brother was much younger than the first, and the mother believed her son



could relate to him much better because of this. They had gone out about three times prior to the second interview. The relationship at that point, as viewed by the mother, was both positive and consistent.

The mother related a recent incident which highlighted how a Big Brother can, unknowingly, get involved in family struggles and problems. Shortly after being matched with the second Big Brother, the family had planned to go away for a weekend. The trip had to be cancelled at the last minute, and her son wanted to phone his Big Brother so they could get together. The mother told him not to phone because the Big Brother had already made other plans. As the mother reported:

The little bugger went behind my back and phoned him, and they made arrangements for Saturday, and then (the Big Brother) phoned back Saturday morning and asked if it was OK that they did go.

The son had not had any contact with his father during the study period. He had recently been quite upset as he and his sister had been told they wouldn't be visiting him the coming summer. The only reason given by the father was that his wife could not get any holiday time. The mother thought her ex-spouse was unaware their son had a Big Brother.

The mother had not noticed any change in family relationships and stated that her son having a Big Brother did not affect her or her daughter in any way. Her discipline problems with him were "about the same," although they were no longer going for counselling together. She stated that neither she nor her son had been "getting anything out of it." She had been seeing a counsellor on her own for about two months, and had been finding that helpful.

She reported that her son related to men and peers about the same. He had been working harder in school because, the mother stated, "he knows if he doesn't he's not going to make it (through the year)." She noted that he had recently written exams on which he earned 80%. His behavior in the classroom had still been a problem--he was still the "class clown." His teacher had put him on a behavior contract at school, and that been helping quite a bit.

### Results of the Self-Esteem Inventories

At the pre-test, the mother's level of self-esteem was in the medium range at 52 points. This score was the second lowest of all the mothers. At the post-test, her score had increased significantly by 12 points. This represented the second largest increase of all the mothers. Her son's Total Self score, at the pre-test session, was 70 points. This was the second lowest score of the five boys. On the subscales, his scores were quite low on General Self, Home-Parents, and School-Academic. His Lie Scale score was the second highest, and yet was not considered so high as to affect the validity of his answers. At the post-test, his Total Self score decreased significantly by 14 points. This was the greatest decrease of all the boys. This was reflected by lower scores on the General Self and Home-Parents subscales. A slight decrease in his Lie Scale score indicated a small reduction in defensiveness.

### Results of the Family Relations Tests

At the pre-test session, Child D was most involved with both his mother and father, equally. He was very careful about attributing the same positive and negative items to each. The nature of the relationships was largely positive, with slightly more incoming than outgoing positive feelings. At the post-test, total involvement with the father decreased significantly by six items. The decrease was reflected in fewer outgoing and incoming positive feelings, and no outgoing negative feelings. Total involvement with his mother decreased by four items, and was reflected in fewer positive feelings, both incoming and outgoing.

The relationship with his sister remained largely the same over the study period. He was not very involved with her at either time (approximately seven items). The nature of the relationship was characterized as mostly negative outgoing.

The 'nobody' figure was used a fair bit at both sessions. At the pre-test, outgoing positive and negative feelings, and some incoming negative feelings, were attributed to 'nobody.' At the post-test, some of the outgoing positive feelings previously attributed to mother and father were assigned to 'nobody.'

Total involvement with the Big Brother was the second lowest of all the boys, at four items. It must be remembered that the relationship had been established only a month prior to the post-test session. Despite this, a shift in involvement from family members to

Table 5

## RESULTS OF THE BENE ANTHONY FAMILY RELATIONS TEST

CHILD D

|             | OUTGOING<br>POSITIVE |      | OUTGOING<br>NEGATIVE |      | INCOMING<br>POSITIVE |      | INCOMING<br>NEGATIVE |      | TOTAL INVOLVEMENT |      |
|-------------|----------------------|------|----------------------|------|----------------------|------|----------------------|------|-------------------|------|
|             | PRE                  | POST | PRE                  | POST | PRE                  | POST | PRE                  | POST | PRE               | POST |
| MOTHER      | 6                    | 3    | 2                    | 2    | 8                    | 7    | 5                    | 5    | 21                | 17   |
| SISTER      | 1                    | 1    | 5                    | 4    | 0                    | 0    | 1                    | 1    | 7                 | 6    |
| SELF        | 0                    | 0    | 0                    | 0    | 0                    | 0    | 0                    | 0    | 0                 | 0    |
| FATHER      | 6                    | 4    | 2                    | 0    | 8                    | 6    | 5                    | 5    | 21                | 15   |
| 'NOBODY'    | 1                    | 3    | 2                    | 2    | 0                    | 0    | 2                    | 1    | 5                 | 6    |
| BIG BROTHER | 1                    |      | 0                    |      | 3                    |      | 0                    |      |                   | 4    |

the Big Brother was evident. The relationship was characterized as completely positive, with more incoming than outgoing feelings experienced.

#### First Family Interview

In the first family interview, Family D was assessed as problem-laden and quite dysfunctional. On the family structure dimension, the family was rated as having a limited and erratic leadership. The mother rarely assumed a leadership role, looked to her children to answer most of the questions, and had to be directly asked for her opinion. The boundary between the parental and sibling subsystem was weak. There was a very strong coalition and overinvolved relationship between mother and daughter. This was highlighted when the mother was asked what had been her most enjoyable time with the family, and she stated:

When (my daughter) and I took a trip three years ago. It was just the two of us.

And it was just the two of us, and (to her daughter) it was kind of neat, eh?

During the interview they sat very close together, often held hands, and the mother frequently gave her daughter warm looks and smiles. Towards her son, however, she appeared very rejecting and uninvolved. She directed a number of angry comments and threats to him, and at one point had to restrain herself from hitting him. At the time of the first interview, he had been back in the home, after staying with his father, for five weeks. He seemed to be trying hard to please her and fit in.

The mother's parental control was seen as unsuccessful and rebuffed. Her son often acted "silly" and misbehaved, and the two children often ended up in giggling fits. She would usually blame her son for these. The giggling probably served to release the tension, which was quite high throughout the sessions. In general, the daughter was treated as the 'cute little angel,' and the son 'the bad boy.'

On the family cohesion dimension, the family was rated towards the disengaged end of the continuum. Family involvement and bonding was quite low except for the mother-daughter relationship, which was rated as a very high degree of emotional closeness. Personal separateness seemed to typify family members. There seemed to be few activities engaged in together as a family.

In terms of family adaptability, the family was rated towards the chaotic end of the continuum. Discipline was quite laissez-faire and ineffective, and the mother was very



lenient towards the children's behavior. There appeared to be a lack of role clarity and frequent role shifts and reversals, particularly as to who was the leader. Family rules appeared to be inconsistently enforced. Family negotiations were endless.

There were some problems evident on the family communication dimension. The family was rated as having a low degree of clarity of verbal messages, and there were frequent incongruencies between their verbal and non-verbal messages. Most striking was the low degree of discussion of self, feelings, and relationships. They appeared to have a very rigid rule forbidding them to express what they thought or felt. This was most obvious when members were asked about the most enjoyable, and the most difficult, time they have had as a family. Members had some difficulty talking about an enjoyable time, and all were unable to think of, or talk about, a difficult time. The tension and sense of discomfort was extremely high during both of the questions. The same difficulty arose when they were asked what they would change in the family. The boy glibly answered "my socks." Members either could not think of anything or chose to change something external to family relationships, such as the house. Occasional invasions were evident. Members were also rated as having a low degree of respect and regard for the feelings and messages of others. The mother encouraged her children to speak freely, and then 'attacked' them for what they said. She would also discount many of her son's statements.

On the family affect dimension, the family was rated as having little expression of feeling. The mood and tone was seen as overtly hostile, and particularly so for the mother-son relationship. The family was rated as having a fairly severe level of conflict, which impaired, to a great degree, group functioning. This conflict was largely seen to be coming from the mother towards her son.

#### Second Family Interview

In the second interview, a number of positive changes in family functioning were observed. In terms of family structure, although the mother's leadership role remained limited, a major shift had occurred on the 'parent-child coalition' variable. There was a clearer boundary between mother and daughter and, although their relationship was still seen as overinvolved, it was not as extreme nor as excluding of the boy as was observed in the first interview. The daughter still seemed to be the giggle-y 'angel.' The mother-son relationship had improved dramatically. The mother seemed fairly encouraging, supportive,

and accepting towards him. For his part, he was not so much the 'clown' during the interview, and was in fact very quiet and answered "I don't know" to most of the questions. He often appeared overtly hostile towards his mother. For example, several times he 'shot' her with his 'finger gun.' Her increased warmth towards him may have made it 'safer' for him to express his anger and hostility.

On the family cohesion dimension, some minor changes were evident. Although family involvement and emotional bonding remained quite disengaged, members were rated as 'connected' in terms of family boundaries and friends. Interests and recreation still tended to be separate.

In terms of family adaptability, discipline was still rated as laissez-faire and somewhat ineffective. There remained a lack of role clarity. Family rules and problem-solving style, however, was rated as 'flexible.' Members seemed to easily and naturally negotiate amongst themselves and reach agreed-upon decisions.

Family communication remained a major problem area for this family, although some improvements were observed. Clarity of expression remained at a low level, with many incongruent messages noted. Particularly evident in this interview were the high number of angry/hostile non-verbal messages which accompanied meaningless or irrelevant verbal messages. Members' freedom of expression was rated as even lower than in the first interview. There were major limitations on members' willingness to discuss self, feelings, and relationships. This was most evident in their interaction when asked what they would change in their family.

(son points to his mother, daughter points to her brother)

mother: (to son) Well, what would you change?

son: I don't know.

mother: Think about it. It's so easy to say 'I don't know' or 'I forgot.' Come on.

daughter: Him.

mother: (to daughter) You would change your brother?

son: I would change (points to mother).

mother: You would change your mother, is that it?

son: Ya.

- mother: Oh, OK.
- daughter: I don't know. I like things how they are.
- mother: If I could change something, well, that's a tough one (looks directly at her son).
- son: I think she'd change me.
- mother: (laughs, and says in a slightly sarcastic tone of voice) Why would I do that?
- daughter: I would.
- mother: (after a long silence) I would change the color of the house (looks directly at her son).
- son: Ya, right.

In this interview, there was little evidence of invasions. The 'respect and regard' variable was rated as significantly improved. Members were much more respectful of each other's feelings and messages. The mother, in particular, seemed much more accepting of her children's statements and opinions.

Improvements were also observed on the family affect dimension. Although the range of feelings was still seen as fairly restricted, the family's mood and tone was much warmer and more affectionate. There was not as much overt hostility, and the mother's interactions with her son were not as openly hostile as they had been previously. The degree of unresolvable conflict had lessened, and did not seem to impair family functioning.

During the family interview, the mother reported that her son's relationship with his second Big Brother had met her hopes and expectations:

Well, after going through the first one, I wasn't too sure. But, I'm really pleased with what has been happening just in the last month. I think he's got someone else to think about and whenever he comes back he seems to be quite happy and excited about some of the things they've done. I can't do with him, and he enjoys doing them.

## **B. General Patterns and Themes**

### **Results of the Self-Esteem Inventories**

Research Question #1: Are there measurable changes in the level of self-esteem of the child and his mother?

Results of the SEI, Adult Form, are presented in Table 6. The most significant pattern of change identified was that the level of self-esteem increased for three of the four mothers. This increase ranged from 4 to 20 points. One mother's level of self-esteem decreased slightly by four points. This was thought to be due specifically to her job termination and financial instability during the study period. In terms of descriptive range, one mother's score rose from the low to the medium range. All other scores remained in the same general range. It is important to note that Adult A and D, who had the two highest score increases, had been receiving personal counselling during the study period. This, and the involvement of the Big Brother, were thought to co-influence each other, and may help explain the dramatic increase.

Results of the SEI, School Form, are presented in Table 7. The most significant pattern of change was that the level of self-esteem decreased for four of the five boys. Total Self Score decreases ranged from 6 to 14 points. On the subscales, the largest decreases were identified on the General Self scale. Only one boy's score (Child B1) increased by four points. This boy was the only one who felt, at the time of the post-test, that he didn't really have a Big Brother. Thus, it could be hypothesized that if he had had an on-going, consistent relationship with a Big Brother, his level of self-esteem would also have decreased. These results were both unexpected and puzzling, particularly as the main objective of the Edmonton Big Brothers' Program was to enhance the child's self-esteem. Some possible explanations and implications of this finding will be discussed in the following chapter.

### **Results of the Family Relations Test**

Research Question #2: Are there measurable changes in the boys' perception of family relationships?



Table 6  
RESULTS OF THE SELF-ESTEEM INVENTORY, ADULT FORM

|         | PRE-TEST    | POST-TEST   | ABSOLUTE<br>DIFFERENCE |
|---------|-------------|-------------|------------------------|
| ADULT A | 16 (low)    | 36 (medium) | +20                    |
| ADULT B | 84 (high)   | 88 (high)   | +4                     |
| ADULT C | 88 (high)   | 84 (high)   | -4                     |
| ADULT D | 52 (medium) | 64 (medium) | +12                    |

Total Possible Raw Score = 100

Self-Esteem Levels:

High 75 - 100

Medium 26 - 74

Low 0 - 25

Table 7

## RESULTS OF THE SELF-ESTEEM INVENTORY, SCHOOL FORM

| SUB-SCALES<br>(total possible raw score) | CHILD A |      | CHILD B1 |      | CHILD B2 |      | CHILD C |      | CHILD D |      |
|------------------------------------------|---------|------|----------|------|----------|------|---------|------|---------|------|
|                                          | PRE     | POST | PRE      | POST | PRE      | POST | PRE     | POST | PRE     | POST |
| GENERAL SELF (26)                        | 19      | 16   | 25       | 26   | 25       | 23   | 22      | 19   | 19      | 15   |
| SOCIAL SELF-PEERS (8)                    | 7       | 6    | 7        | 8    | 8        | 8    | 6       | 7    | 8       | 8    |
| HOME-PARENTS (8)                         | 4       | 5    | 8        | 8    | 7        | 7    | 7       | 6    | 5       | 2    |
| SCHOOL-ACADEMIC (8)                      | 5       | 3    | 8        | 8    | 8        | 7    | 6       | 6    | 4       | 4    |
| <u>TOTAL SELF SCORE (100)</u>            | 70      | 60   | 96       | 100  | 96       | 90   | 82      | 76   | 72      | 58   |
| LIE SCALE (8)                            | 5       | 3    | 2        | 2    | 1        | 1    | 1       | 1    | 3       | 2    |

Results of the Family Relations Test are presented in Tables 1 to 5. Between the pre-and-post tests there were a number of changes identified which will be discussed according to family member.

- i) For four of the five boys, total involvement with the mother decreased slightly. At the post-test, four boys attributed fewer items to their mothers than at the pre-test session. The decrease ranged from one to four items. For one child (Child A), total involvement increased by five items.
- ii) For all boys, the nature of their relationship to their mother remained the same. At both the pre-and-post sessions, all boys characterized this relationship as primarily positive. Typically, there were more incoming positive items than outgoing items. The boys attributed few negative outgoing feelings to their mothers (one or two at most). More negative items were seen as incoming, and these were usually for parenting-type statements such as:

You scold (child's name). Who scolds (child's name)?

Thus, the boys' relationships to their mother remained fairly stable despite the involvement of a Big Brother.

- iii) There was no one pattern identified for either total involvement or nature of the relationship of the boys' relationship to siblings. At the post-test session, total involvement with siblings increased for two boys, stayed the same for one boy, and decreased for two boys. For Child B1, B2, and D the nature of the relationship was mostly negative outgoing at both sessions. For Child A, the relationship was characterized as mostly positive incoming. For Child C, the relationship was viewed as mostly positive incoming at the pre-test, and equally positive and negative at the post-test.
- iv) Total involvement with the fathers decreased for all boys. At the post-test session, all boys attributed fewer items to their father than at the pre-test. This decrease ranged from one to eight items. This pattern was quite dramatic since the actual type and quantity of contact the boys had with their fathers had not changed over the study period. Despite this, his psychological importance to the child decreased significantly.
- v) For four of the five boys, the nature of the relationship to the father remained the

same.

Despite the decrease in involvement, for most boys the nature of the relationship to their father remained the same at both sessions. For boys B1, B2, and D, the relationship was experienced as positive. For Child C, the relationship was primarily negative at the pre-test and completely negative at the post-test. The one exception to this pattern was Child A who, at the pre-test, characterized the relationship as completely positive. At the post-test, however, a dramatic shift had occurred and the relationship was viewed as completely negative. All negative items were outgoing to the father.

- vi) Total involvement to the Big Brother varied according to the quality and consistency of the relationship over the study period.

For the three boys who had on-going, good relationships with their Big Brothers, total involvement ranged from four to ten items. Child D, who had been matched to two Big Brothers, the second of which had been initiated only a few weeks prior to the post-test session, total involvement was four items. The lowest involvement, at one item, was for Child B1, whose relationship had never 'gotten off the ground.'

- vii) For some boys, total involvement with the Big Brother was greater than that with their fathers.

For the three boys who had an on-going relationship with their Big Brother over the six-month period, total involvement, or the psychological importance of the Big Brother exceeded that of their fathers at the post-test session.

- viii) For all boys, the nature of the relationship with the Big Brother was characterized as completely positive.

This was one of the clearest and most consistent patterns identified. For all boys, the relationship was completely positive, with no negative incoming or outgoing items attributed to the Big Brothers. There were also more incoming positive items than outgoing items for all boys.

The Big Brother-Little Brother relationships could be described as being in the 'honeymoon' stage in which both parties see only the positive and similar aspects of the other, ignoring their faults, flaws, and differences. Conflict is likely suppressed and avoided in the fear that it will destroy the relationship. Hopes and expectations of the Big

Brother, Little Brother, and probably of the mother, may be high, and the Big Brother may be seen as the 'solution' to various problems and issues.

Another important pattern identified was that the boys experienced their Big Brothers as 'giving to' them more than they 'give back.' Being so much on the receiving end may put the child in a dependent and vulnerable position. The boys may feel both needy and afraid, for if they open up and accept the Big Brother they may once again lose someone important to them. Feelings of being unworthy of positive feelings from a man may surface, particularly for those boys who have had a rejecting and negative relationship with their fathers. These patterns, and their possible relationship to the child's level of self-esteem, will be discussed in the following chapter.

### **Results of the Family Rating Scale**

Research Question #3: Are there observable and measurable changes in five dimensions of the family system?

The family interviews were viewed and rated independently, using the Family Rating Scale, by two observers, one of whom was the researcher. Later analysis showed that all variables were rated by both raters as either the same or within one point along the continuum. There was common agreement as to each family's general level of functioning, specific problem areas, and degree and direction of change.

For all four families, changes in family functioning were observed and measured. The direction and degree of change, however, varied greatly. The functioning of two of the four families was rated as significantly improved at the post-interview session. Family D, assessed as problem-laden and quite dysfunctional at the first interview, was seen to improve the most. This was reflected by a shift in 10 variables in each of the five dimensions on the Rating Scale. A major two-point shift on the family communication dimension was also observed. Family A, assessed as somewhat dysfunctional, was also seen to improve, though not to the extent of Family D. This was reflected on the scale by shifts in five variables on three dimensions, including a two-point shift on the family structure dimension. In both families, the Big Brother relationships were positive and consistent, although for Family D the match had been initiated only a few weeks prior to the second interview. Another factor which likely influenced the improved functioning was



Table 8  
RESULTS OF THE FAMILY RATING SCALE

|                                                                  | FAMILY A<br>PRE POST | FAMILY B<br>PRE POST | FAMILY C<br>PRE POST | FAMILY D<br>PRE POST         |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|
| <u>A. FAMILY STRUCTURE</u>                                       |                      |                      |                      |                              |
| Leadership Style                                                 | 1 2                  | 3 3                  | 3 2                  | 2 2                          |
| Parent-child Coalitions                                          | 1 3                  | 3 3                  | 3 3                  | 1 2                          |
| <u>B. FAMILY COHESION</u>                                        |                      |                      |                      |                              |
| Family Involvement                                               | 2 2                  | 3 3                  | 2 2                  | 2 2                          |
| Emotional Bonding                                                | 2 3                  | 3 3                  | 3 2                  | 2 2<br>4 4 (mother-daughter) |
| Individual Boundaries                                            | 2 2                  | 3 3                  | 3 2                  | 2 2                          |
| Time (physical and emotional)                                    | 2 2                  | 3 2                  | 2 2                  | 2 2                          |
| Family Boundaries                                                | 2 2                  | 2 2                  | 2 1                  | 2 3                          |
| Friends                                                          | 2 2                  | 3 3                  | 3 2                  | 2 3                          |
| Interests and Recreation                                         | 2 2                  | 3 3                  | 2 1                  | 2 2                          |
| Extended Family, Institutional and<br>Community Interconnections | 3 3                  | 3 3                  | 3 3                  | 3 3                          |
| Community Involvement                                            | 3 3                  | 3 3                  | 3 3                  | 3 3                          |

|                                 | FAMILY A |      | FAMILY B |      | FAMILY C |      | FAMILY D |      |
|---------------------------------|----------|------|----------|------|----------|------|----------|------|
|                                 | PRE      | POST | PRE      | POST | PRE      | POST | PRE      | POST |
| <u>C. FAMILY ADAPTABILITY</u>   |          |      |          |      |          |      |          |      |
| Discipline                      | 4        | 4    | 3        | 3    | 3        | 4    | 4        | 4    |
| Roles                           | 4        | 4    | 3        | 3    | 3        | 3    | 4        | 4    |
| Rules                           | 4        | 4    | 3        | 3    | 3        | 4    | 4        | 3    |
| Negotiation and Problem-Solving | 4        | 4    | 3        | 3    | 3        | 3    | 4        | 3    |
| <u>D. FAMILY COMMUNICATION</u>  |          |      |          |      |          |      |          |      |
| Clarity of Expression           | 3        | 3    | 4        | 4    | 4        | 3    | 2        | 2    |
| Freedom of Expression           | 3        | 4    | 4        | 4    | 4        | 4    | 2        | 1    |
| Invasiveness                    | 3        | 2    | 3        | 4    | 3        | 3    | 3        | 4    |
| Respect and Regard              | 2        | 2    | 4        | 3    | 3        | 3    | 2        | 4    |
| <u>E. FAMILY AFFECT</u>         |          |      |          |      |          |      |          |      |
| Range of Feelings               | 4        | 4    | 4        | 3    | 4        | 3    | 2        | 2    |
| Mood and Tone                   | 4        | 4    | 4        | 4    | 4        | 3    | 3        | 4    |
| Unresolvable Conflict           | 3        | 3    | 4        | 4    | 4        | 3    | 2        | 3    |

that both mothers had been receiving counselling during the study period.

Family C, originally assessed as a well-functioning family, was rated as having a decreased level of functioning at the second interview. Small shifts were observed and rated along 12 variables in all five dimensions. The decrease could largely be attributed to two unforeseen and complicating factors that had taken place in the study period. The first was the developmental changes and challenges of a family member entering adolescence; and the second, the mother's termination from her job and the financial and emotional struggles involved in obtaining another position. The Big Brother relationship had been on-going and positive over the study period, and may have helped the boy, to some degree, remain apart from the increased conflict and frustration in the family.

Family B, assessed as solid and well-functioning at the first interview, was seen to change the least. Small, one-point shifts were observed in four variables on three dimensions. About half of the shifts were due to the increased hostility and negative feelings between the brothers. The large discrepancy in their Big Brother relationships and the resentment and 'rubbing it in' that occurred around that, could account for the shift. Despite this, the family was seen as stable enough to absorb and offset the potentially negative effects of an inconsistent, or non-existent, Big Brother.

#### **Discussion of the Personal and Family Interviews**

Research Question #4: Are there common themes and experiences amongst the families that can be identified?

- 1) In all families, impacts on the boys were noted in both positive and negative directions. These were not, however, always directly attributed to the involvement of the Big Brother.

For the three boys who had positive relationships with their Big Brothers over the study period, impacts noted by the mother were all positive. These included:

- increased self-esteem (or feeling better about oneself)
- increased self-confidence
- improved relationships to adult men and reduced need for male contact
- small improvements in family relationships

-improved school performance and behavior.

The mothers of the two boys who had inconsistent or negative experiences with their Big Brothers reported negative impacts on their sons. The major area this was noted was in a decreased level of school performance. Child D's school performance dropped dramatically in all areas after his first Big Brother failed to contact him again after one outing. For Child B1, dramatically reduced performance in one subject area was noted. This boy had both an inconsistent, and non-existent, relationship with his Big Brother.

2) The Big Brother as 'buddy' or special male friend.

At the pre-interview, all of the mothers stated that they hoped a Big Brother would be a special male friend to their son. His male influence would help him learn to act like a boy, give him someone he could talk to about 'boy stuff,' and provide him with someone to do activities with that the mothers themselves were either unable or unwilling to do. At the post-interview, all those interviewed stated that the Big Brother had, to varying degrees, become a 'buddy' and friend. Some of the mothers were surprised at how quickly their sons had accepted the Big Brother and how close they had become in a short period of time. The relationship in all but one case (Child B1), had met or exceeded both the boys' and the mothers' hopes and expectations.

3) Many of the families seemed to be, to varying degrees, expelling a family member.

In those families in which the Little Brother was the only boy, the mother and daughter(s) seemed to have a very close relationship which often excluded or overtly rejected the boy. Closeness seemed to be based on gender and common interests. This was most apparent in the first set of interviews. The mothers often had discipline problems with the boys or difficulties controlling and limiting his behavior. The boys seemed to be on the periphery of the family, either ignored or openly rejected by family members.

At the post-interviews, many of the boys seemed to receive a needed sense of closeness and feeling liked, supported, and accepted in their relationship to their Big Brother. This could be seen as developing an affiliation with an adult outside the family. Family members still appeared to ignore or exclude the boy, but not to the

extreme evident in the first interviews. The decrease in family members' tendency to expell the boy may be related to this affilliation. As the Big Brother was able to meet some of the child's needs outside the family, this could reduce members' frustration and possible guilt about being unable and unwilling to meet his needs. The boy's position in the family may become, over time, more accepted and secure as a result.

4) Theme of father 'the bad guy' and Big Brother 'the good guy.'

Many of the family members, in the first interviews, expressed their negative views towards the ex-spouse / father. At the post interviews, some were even more negative or more open about their negative feelings. Compared to their views towards the Big Brother, a polarization seemed to have taken place such that the father was seen as 'the bad guy,' and the Big Brother was seen by all as 'the good guy.' In some ways, this polarization seemed to reflect a subtle coalition of the family with the Big Brother, against the father. For example, in Family B, the younger boy was considering not visiting his father for the summer as he might miss a two-day trip he and his Big Brother were planning. The mother seemed to go along with this, and possibly was covertly encouraging it, as she reported her son really didn't think too much of his father. It is not too difficult to understand how this covert coalition may develop, particularly if the father-son relationship had been rejecting. In the above family, the father had maintained on-going contact with his sons, and the newly-developed coalition may have serious consequences for their relationship. Difficulties may also arise if the Big Brother terminates after his minimum one-year commitment. The long-term implications of this need to be further investigated and explored.

5) Many of the Big Brother-Little Brother relationships were affected by family problems and conflicts.

The degree to which this involvement occurred varied from the mother openly requesting the Big Brother to assume a quasi-parental role, to the Big Brother having to cope with and limit his Little Brother's childish and uncontrolled behavior in his contact with the boy. In only one family was there no evidence of this type of involvement, and it is probably no coincidence that this family was the only one



considered stable and well-functioning at both interviews. The families who were functioning poorly, or facing situational stresses, were the most likely to involve the Big Brother in their issues and struggles.

#### Interrelationships

In addition to the patterns and themes previously outlined, two patterns of interrelationship between study variables were noted. The first of these was the level of family functioning and the level of members' self-esteem. At the pre-test session, the two families considered fairly well-functioning (Family B and C) had members with the highest levels of self-esteem. Conversely, for the two families who appeared to have some problems in their functioning (Family A and D), the mothers and sons had the lowest levels of self-esteem. This relationship was maintained at the post-test, despite the general increases in the mother's scores and the decreases in the scores of their sons.

The second pattern of interrelationship was between the level of family functioning and total involvement, or psychological importance, of the Big Brother. This relationship was, however, not as clear as the previous one due to the varying lengths of time the Big Brothers had been involved in the families. For Family A and D, the importance of the Big Brother to the boys was quite high. Involvement with the Big Brother was also high for Child C whose family, at the post-test, was facing situational/developmental stresses and had a decreased level of functioning. For Child B1 and B2, total involvement was the lowest, despite the fact that Child B2 had a consistent and positive relationship with his Big Brother over the previous six months. Many of the needs of the boys in this stable, well-functioning family were likely met in the family, and the Big Brother may be an important, but not necessary, addition.

#### Summary

A Big Brother was found to have an impact at both the individual and family level. The self-esteem of the mothers generally increased while that of the boys decreased. Some possible explanations for this will be discussed in the next chapter. The boys' perception of family relationships shifted considerably. In particular, the psychological importance of the father decreased as the importance of the Big Brother to the boy increased. Total involvement with the Big Brother seemed to vary according to the quality

and consistency of the relationship. The mother-son relationship, however, remained fairly stable.

One of the clearest patterns that emerged was the nature of the Big Brother relationship as a positive, largely giving one. The relationship, a few months after its initiation, could be described as in a 'honeymoon' stage. This will also be discussed in the following chapter, along with possible implications for the program itself.

At the family level, about half of the families were observed to improve in functioning over the study period, one family remained basically the same, and one family seemed to have 'taken a step back.' The Big Brother was thought to be a major influencing factor, along with other factors such as the effects of counselling and situational stresses. A specific dynamic identified was that the families who had some functioning difficulties tended to involve the Big Brother in their conflicts and problems. Also, a covert coalition seemed to develop between the family and the Big Brother against the father. This dynamic and its possible implications need to be further explored. Finally, the boys seemed to affiliate quickly and easily with their Big Brothers, and the relationship met many of their unfulfilled needs. This affiliation may help other family members accept the boy and his place in the family.

In the next, and final, chapter, the major findings will be further discussed, and possible implications for the Big Brothers program outlined. Areas of further research are suggested, the research process will be reviewed, and some improvements and refinements recommended.

## V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The involvement of a Big Brother appeared to have a significant impact on the single-parent families in this study. There could be no doubt that the Big Brother, very early on, became a valued and significant person to the boy, influencing, or co-influencing changes for the boy, his mother, and the family as a whole. This impact was either positive or negative, depending on such factors as the quality and consistency of the Big Brother relationship, and the boy's awareness and understanding of factors influencing the Big Brother which affected their relationship. Examples of this include the job transfer and marital difficulties influencing two of the Big Brothers in this study, and which directly influenced their relationship to the Little Brother. To minimize potential negative impact, lines of communication between the family, Big Brother, and agency, need to be clear and on-going.

In general, areas of impact ranged from the boy's school performance and relationships to adult men, to coalitions in the family and other aspects of family functioning. During the study period, several other factors influenced some of the families such as the loss of a job, developmental change in a family member, and on-going counselling. The impacts of these and the involvement of the Big Brother could not be separated out. What seems most likely is that they co-influenced each other, leading to shifts towards increased or decreased levels of individual and family functioning.

The results of this study are not generalizable to all families involved in Big Brother programs, nor to single-parent families in general. As an exploratory study, this research has established a base from which further research can be undertaken. Suggestions for further research on the Big Brother-Little Brother relationship will be outlined. Also, this study may be a first step towards generating research on the impact of other non-family relationships on the family. Some of the major patterns identified in the study, and their possible implications, are the focus of this chapter. They will be discussed in two sections: self-esteem and the Big Brother-Little Brother relationship; and the single-parent families. Reflections on the research process, particularly the use of the Family Rating Scale, will be outlined.

### A. Self-Esteem and the Big Brother-Little Brother Relationship

Two major patterns were identified in this study which have important implications for the Big Brothers program. The first is that, from one to six months after the introduction of a Big Brother, the boy's level of self-esteem decreased. The second is that, from one to six months after the involvement of a Big Brother, the boy experienced their relationship as a largely positive, giving one, towards the boy. It seems likely that these two patterns are inter-related; that is, the positive relationship influenced the boy's level of self-esteem, and his self-evaluation influenced his perception of the relationship. It is one of the major goals of the Big Brothers program to provide a child with a positive, 'unconditional' friendship relationship with an adult male, and this was clearly the case for most of the boys in this study. Implied is that such a friendship relationship would have a positive impact on the boys. That the boy's level of self-esteem actually decreased was thus both surprising and unexpected. Some possible explanations for this will be outlined.

- i) The boys may initially feel unworthy or undeserving of being liked and accepted by an adult male, and this feeling of unworthiness may generalize and be reflected by an overall decrease in self-esteem. It must be remembered that many of the boys had a relationship to their fathers which could be described as either covertly or openly rejecting. As was discussed in Chapter II, Wallerstein and Kelly found that the impact of such a relationship on the child was to lower their self-esteem and make them feel unloved and unlovable. These feelings may re-surface after the introduction of a Big Brother. Feelings of being unlovable would be even more apparent with the Big Brother offering an 'unconditional,' positive relationship.
- ii) Related to the above is that the boys (and their families) tend to idealize the Big Brothers. The boys may compare themselves with him and, given their flaws, faults, and other imperfections, may find themselves lacking.
- iii) Being in a positive, largely giving relationship can place the person on the receiving end in a somewhat vulnerable and dependent position. The feeling that one is dependent on another's goodwill and generosity may reduce one's self-evaluation. The Little Brother is in what could be considered a 'one-down' position. Not only is he the child in an adult-child relationship, but he is being 'given to' in a relationship which, by its very definition, he is the needy party. Also, the fear of opening up to



another male, and possibly again being rejected by him, or again losing someone important to him, may be an extremely vulnerable position to be in. The boys may not even be consciously aware of their fears, worries, and feelings of vulnerability, and yet these may be contributing to the boys' decreased self-evaluation.

- iv) To elaborate on and extend explanation iii), there may be a component to self-esteem which has been overlooked. In Chapter I, two components of self-esteem were outlined as a feeling of being worthwhile and valuable to a significant person, and a feeling of being competent. These components were certainly met in most of the Big Brother-Little Brother relationships in this study. It may be that there is a third aspect of self-esteem which is the ability, and willingness, to give to a significant other in a positive way. Specifically, the boys, in order to feel good about themselves, may need to give to their Big Brothers as much as they receive from them. Only then may their level of self-esteem increase.

If any or all of these explanations hold some element of truth, a number of implications for the Big Brothers program are suggested. The intent of the program is to provide, encourage, and support a friendship relationship between a man and a boy. This implies a two-way relationship, with both parties giving and receiving. One element of the program may need to be assisting the boys, and the Big Brothers, in establishing a two-way relationship as quickly as possible. Some of the boys may need extra help in first being able to open up to, and trust, an adult male. Fears of rejection and loss may have to be surfaced and discussed, against the very real possibility of a short-term Big Brother relationship. The Big Brothers may need to be made aware of the importance of a two-way relationship, so that their needs for giving to the boy do not disallow or override providing opportunities for the boy to give to him. Allowing and encouraging the Little Brother to initiate telephone contact and suggest and plan activities may be small, but important, means to this end.

The nature of the Big Brother-Little Brother relationship, after about six months, was found to be in a 'honeymoon' phase. Differences are likely suppressed and ignored, conflicts avoided. Activities were generally of the entertainment/recreational variety. Whether these relationships evolve into an emotionally close, intimate friendship, or stagnate at the honeymoon stage, is probably crucial to the impact and longevity of the



relationship. Such questions as 'What is considered to be a good Big Brother-Little Brother relationship?', 'What elements are common to those relationships?', and 'What factors promote and encourage the evolution of a relationship?' need to be discussed and explored. The onus is largely on the Big Brother, as the adult, to promote the evolution of the relationship, and yet not all Big Brothers may have the maturity, life experiences, awareness, or skills to do so. This is one area in which the agency could be providing relationship information, support, and enhancement. Workshops on relationship skills and relationship building should be an integral, on-going component of the program.



All of these suggestions imply a shift towards increased support and enhancement of existing Big Brother-Little Brother relationships. Much of the program focus may be on establishing the relationship (i.e., intake, matching, and so on), and crisis-resolution or trouble-shooting with existing matches. This is not too surprising given the large number of matches and limited financial resources and staff. Still, it may be that relationship support and enhancement have a hidden benefit in that it may reduce the number of terminations, particularly after a Big Brother has fulfilled his minimum one-year commitment. Big Brother caseworkers have observed that a common reason for Big Brother termination is that he feels he is continually 'giving to' the Little Brother, and is not getting anything back (personal communication). Although a desire to give to a boy may bring men into the program, a one-way relationship cannot sustain anyone for very long, to say nothing of what impact this type of relationship may have on the child's self-esteem. Building the number of new matches, and helping improve the quality of existing matches, are two program goals which should have equal recognition and which serve the same purpose of providing, supporting, and enhancing a two-way friendship relationship between a man and a boy.

The need for open and on-going channels of communication between agency, family, and Big Brother, was also highlighted in this study, in order to minimize the potential negative impacts of the Big Brother relationship. For those boys with irregular Big Brothers, and for the boy whose Big Brother had to terminate but hadn't explained this to the boy, the negative impacts were quite evident, even when the relationship had just been established for a few weeks. The termination of a relationship needs to be handled in such a way to provide closure for the boy and preserve his sense of adequacy and worth. An

irregular or inconsistent relationship needs to be confronted as early as possible, and either improved or terminated, for the sake of the boy. An irregular or non-existent Big Brother may do more harm for the boy, than never having had a Big Brother.

#### **B. The Single-Parent Families**

The four single-parent families involved in this study were thought to fairly accurately represent the typical 'overloaded' single-parent family, a family form that is generally working at capacity on a daily basis. Many of the mothers stated that they were always tired, had little time or energy for anything outside of job and family, and many of their children had a considerable number of chores and responsibilities for their age. After the involvement of the Big Brother, however, many of the mothers recognized that their jobs were made a little bit easier. They had more free time, and just in knowing that another adult was involved with, and positively influencing their son made parenting a bit easier. This may account for the major finding that the mother's level of self-esteem increased with the involvement of a Big Brother, sometimes dramatically. The mother feeling better about herself may also have positive repercussions in the family.

As was discussed in Chapter II, the mother-son relationship in a single-parent home is typically a difficult one for both. The affiliation of the boy with an important, positive adult outside the family appeared to improve the position of the boy in the family, particularly when the other members were all female. For these reasons, the Big Brothers program is an important community service in support of, not only the boys in father-absent homes, but also of the single-parent families themselves.

The four families appeared to be at different points in the divorce adjustment process, despite the fact that many years had passed since the actual legal divorce. It could be said that for most, although the legal divorce had passed, the emotional divorce had not yet taken place. This was reflected in ongoing hostility, long-distance conflict, and resentment. The level of adjustment directly influenced the family's level of functioning. Only one of the four families could be described as stable and well-functioning at both study sessions. This family was also the only one in which the mother and father had a friendly or 'tolerant' relationship, and the children had on-going contact with their father. These factors were identified, in Chapter II, as important for the positive adjustment and

functioning of the single-parent family. The other three families varied in their level of functioning and the children, in one way or another, were either involved in their parents' issues or conflicts, or had assumed the mother's feelings of resentment and anger towards the father. The family's level of adjustment after divorce and functioning as a single-parent family was found to have two important implications for the involvement of a Big Brother. The first was the theme of 'dad the bad guy' and 'Big Brother the good guy,' highlighted in the personal and family interviews. For those families which had not reached a stable point, permitting the children to get to know their fathers, and with some form of 'cooperative' long-distance parenting, this polarization may have long-term repercussions in the family. At the extreme, the family may covertly exclude or prevent the father from establishing a father-son relationship, regardless of the type of contact the father is able and willing to offer. Whether this will work against the eventual positive adjustment of those families must be questioned. Even in the one family in which the boys had on-going contact with their father, continuing that contact was being questioned after a Big Brother became involved with one of the boys. In this case, the view of the father had become more openly described as negative, and the family may choose to let an ongoing relationship with the father end, or become less important. This polarization is even more potentially damaging in the event that the Big Brother relationship terminates, for whatever reason. What effect will this have on those families that cut off ties and maintained their hostility towards the father? It must be emphasized to all families entering the program, particularly to the mothers, that the Big Brother in no way should be seen as taking the place of the boy's father. Continuing with or establishing a positive relationship between the boy and his father, and the mother with the father, is likely very important in the functioning of the single-parent family. Ideally, and to the benefit of all, a positive relationship with both the Big Brother and the father should be supported and encouraged.

The second implication was that those families that had difficulties in their functioning tended to involve the Big Brother, in varying degrees, in family conflicts and struggles. Most of the Big Brothers were involved unknowingly and, probably, unwillingly. This tendency is not too surprising given that many of the families were overloaded both emotionally and in terms of the number of tasks and responsibilities. The need for any kind of help and assistance can be great, and the Big Brother is often viewed as almost an

extended family member. At the very least, he is another adult, and someone the Little Brother respects and admires. The Big Brother's influence may be sincerely recruited for the benefit of the boy. This may be even more likely when the already 'at capacity' family is faced with situational or developmental stresses.

Still, many Big Brothers may be either unable or unwilling to deal with these types of situations. This may indeed be a significant problem, as it has been estimated that the majority of the families involved in the program could be described as multi-problem or poorly functioning (personal communication with Big Brother caseworker). Considerable agency support may be needed to help Big Brothers deal with the difficulties around family involvement. A self-help support group may be a useful forum in which Big Brothers could discuss these, and any other difficult situations they may be facing, and learn from the experiences and advice of others. Such a forum would be another means to support and enhance existing matches.

### **C. The Research Process**

The study design used proved to be quite effective in assessing changes, over time, at both the individual and family level. The multi-method approach, involving the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data, allowed the collection of rich data from a variety of perspectives. This also contributed to the complexity of data analysis and interpretation. These perspectives did not always fit with each other. For example, some of the mothers reported a significant improvement in how their sons felt about themselves, although this was not reflected on their scores on the Self-Esteem Inventory. Four study families, requiring 16 sessions, was close to the limit of what could be adequately handled using the complex and time-consuming study design.

The Self-Esteem Inventories and Family Relations Test were found to be effective and easily-administered test instruments. The SEI's assessed both subtle and dramatic shifts in the subject's self-evaluation, and the School Form allowed the identification of specific sub-areas in which those shifts had occurred. The Family Relations Test provided a 'safe' and non-threatening way for the boys to express their perceptions of family relationships, and assessed subtle changes in those perceptions over time. The test was also found to be very effective in assessing the boys' perception of the nature of his



relationship to his Big Brother.

A major limitation of the study is the reliance on the mother as the principal source of information. This was due to two factors: 1) the use of lengthy personal interviews limited the number of subjects, and 2) the emphasis of this study on verbal communication led the researcher to interview the mothers who were more able than their children to verbalize their reflections on their experiences. Another mode of research could have emphasized the collection of data by non-interview means including observation of the boy interacting with his Big Brother.

The family interviews were extremely valuable in obtaining first-hand information on family functioning. Although the personal interviews with the mothers provided a family history and some information on family dynamics, the observation of family interactions provided a different level of information and assessment which could not be obtained from individual interviews. For example, many of the mothers believed that the involvement of a Big Brother had not influenced family relationships, and yet measurable changes were observed during the family interviews. This may reflect the difficulty of a member to assess and comment on a system of which they are a part.

Conducting the interviews in the family's home seemed to help members feel relaxed and comfortable, at least as relaxed as one can be with the intrusion of an outsider with videotaping equipment and camera. The families were very cooperative and understanding, particularly when difficulties with the equipment arose. Besides the opportunity to view themselves on videotape following the session, the families had little to gain from having an outsider poke, probe, and assess them. Although they were offered a follow-up session to discuss the assessment results, none of the families requested one. Ideally, both researcher and subjects could benefit from the research process.

The family interviews were also very time and energy-consuming. Not only did they require the transporting and setting-up of a great deal of equipment, but also the difficulty of scheduling an hour when all family members, in very busy families, were available. The videotapes, as well as the audiotapes from the personal interviews, required a large time investment for reviewing and transcribing.



The Family Rating Scale was found to be both useful and limiting. It was a useful tool for assessing families along a number of major dimensions, and provided a 'picture' of each family at two points in time which could be easily compared. Perhaps more important than the actual ratings, or numbers, was the framework provided by the scale for describing family functioning. Observations and shifts could be easily assessed and described based on the general dimensions and specific variables.

Some of the variables were difficult to assess, although this may have been due to the interview questions not adequately tapping the desired information. This was the case for two variables--'extended family, institutional, and community interconnections,' and 'community involvement'--which, as previously discussed, could not be used. The variables 'roles' and 'rules,' on the adaptability dimension, were also difficult to assess. As this referred to the family's ability to change these, when required, an assessment of the family at one point in time could not adequately evaluate this. The variables were still assigned a score, although at times it was more of an estimate based on similar variables and observations.

The five-point scale on which variables were assessed presented some difficulties. The first was that both raters were hesitant to rate families at either end of the continuum (a score of one or five), thus most of the scores were in the narrow range from two to four. Due to this narrow range, many of the changes were rated as one-point shifts. Often, a one-point difference did not adequately reflect the degree of change observed. For example, Family C was rated as having a one-point score difference on the variable 'parent-child coalitions.' This one point did not reflect the significant change that was observed during the family interview, and which could only be adequately described in words. In total, only two two-point shifts in functioning were scored.

The most difficult part of the rating scale, however, was the lack of clearly defined and stated criteria as to what differentiates a well-functioning from a poorly-functioning family, and how that would be reflected by the scores on the rating scale. This presented a problem in describing each family's functioning as either improved or not; that is, whether the direction of change was towards an increased or decreased level of functioning. Also, as the end-points on each continuum varied, a change in one direction could indicate improved functioning for one variable, and for another variable,

decreased functioning.

To overcome these problems, a number of changes to the scale could be made. A seven-point scale, with four as the mid-point, and a three-point range on either side, may offer a wider range from which to choose. End-points should be clearly defined as representing either extreme of well or poor levels of functioning, with the mid-point representing a middle-range. Finally, the continuum along which each variable is assessed should be standardized so that the extreme ends of each consistently represent either well or poor levels of functioning. With these refinements, the Family Rating Scale could be an even more effective tool for assessing families and monitoring family system change.

#### D. Suggestions for Further Research

The findings of this exploratory study suggest some tentative hypotheses on which further research could be based. These are:

1. In the first few months after the introduction of a Big Brother, the Big Brother-Little Brother relationship will be in a 'honeymoon' stage. The relationship will be experienced as a largely positive and giving one towards the boy.  
In this stage, the boy's level of self-esteem will decrease.
2. After the introduction of a Big Brother, the mother's level of self-esteem will increase.
3. If the relationship evolves into a two-way, give and take relationship, the boy's level of self-esteem will increase and surpass the pre-Big Brother level.
4. If the Big Brother-Little Brother relationship is positive and consistent, a shift will take place towards increased individual and family functioning. For the boy, increased functioning may be reflected in improved school performance and behavior, and better relationships between men and peers.
5. If the relationship is inconsistent or otherwise unsatisfactory, a shift will occur towards decreased individual and family functioning.
6. Families with functioning difficulties will involve the Big Brother, either overtly or covertly, in power struggles or family issues and conflicts.

The relationship between the provision of a Big Brother and a boy's level of self-esteem was found to be more complex than had originally been thought. Since the

increase of a child's self-esteem is a major objective of the Edmonton program, a long-term study of self-esteem and the nature of the Big Brother-Little Brother relationship should be undertaken. Possible assessment points could be at the point of match with a Big Brother, six months, one year, 18 months, at termination of the relationship, and at re-match, if applicable. Self-Esteem Inventories could be administered to the boys and their mothers. As well, the nature of the relationship could be assessed using the Family Relations Test, as well as by in-depth interviewing of the boys, their mothers, and the Big Brothers. Direct observation and assessment of the boy with his Big Brother would be an interesting perspective. Such a study may provide important information not only on the child's self-esteem over time, but also on what type of Big Brother-Little Brother relationship promotes a child's self-esteem. This information would be extremely useful for program evaluation and development. If such a study framework were found to be efficient and effective, it could be used or modified as an integral component of relationship monitoring and supervision.

### Summary

As has been highlighted in this study, the involvement of a Big Brother alone may not necessarily enhance self-esteem or the positive functioning of the boy and his family. Rather, it is the type, quality, and consistency of the relationship which may influence them, in either a positive or negative direction. Continual monitoring of the Big Brother-Little Brother relationship is required to ensure a positive contact is taking place and, where it is not, to quickly intervene to reduce the possible negative impact on the boy. Support and enhancement of existing relationships should be a major goal of the program to ensure that the relationship is as meaningful to both the boy and his Big Brother as possible. The hidden benefit is that relationship building and enhancement may help to reduce the number of pre-mature Big Brother terminations. A Big Brother is a significant person in the life of a boy and his family, and this most special and unique type of relationship needs to be carefully nurtured and supported.

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**APPENDIX A**

**SELF-ESTEEM INVENTORIES**

**SCHOOL FORM**

**ADULT FORM**

COOPERSMITH INVENTORY SCHOOL FORM

1. Things usually don't bother me.
2. I find it very hard to talk in front of the class.
3. There are lots of things about myself I'd change if I could.
4. I can make up my mind without too much trouble.
5. I'm a lot of fun to be with.
6. I get upset easily at home.
7. It takes me a long time to get used to anything new.
8. I'm popular with kids my own age.
9. My parents usually consider my feelings.
10. I give in very easily.
11. My parents expect too much of me.
12. It's pretty tough to be me.
13. Things are all mixed up in my life.
14. Kids usually follow my ideas.
15. I have a low opinion of myself.
16. There are many times when I'd like to leave home.
17. I often feel upset in school.
18. I'm not as nice looking as most people.
19. If I have something to say, I usually say it.
20. My parents understand me.
21. Most people are better liked than I am.
22. I usually feel as if my parents are pushing me.
23. I often get discouraged at school.
24. I often wish I were someone else.
25. I can't be depended on.
26. I never worry about anything.
27. I'm pretty sure of myself.
28. I'm easy to like.
29. My parents and I have a lot of fun together.
30. I spend a lot of time daydreaming.
31. I wish I were younger.
32. I always do the right thing.
33. I'm proud of my school work.
34. Someone always has to tell me what to do.
35. I'm often sorry for the things I do.
36. I'm never happy.
37. I'm doing the best work that I can.
38. I can usually take care of myself.
39. I'm pretty happy.
40. I would rather play with children younger than I am.
41. I like everyone I know.
42. I like to be called on in class.
43. I understand myself.
44. No one pays much attention to me at home.
45. I never get scolded.
46. I'm not doing as well in school as I'd like to.
47. I can make up my mind and stick to it.
48. I really don't like being a boy (girl).
49. I don't like to be with other people.
50. I'm never shy.
51. I often feel ashamed of myself.
52. Kids pick on me very often.
53. I always tell the truth.
54. My teachers make me feel I'm not good enough.
55. I don't care what happens to me.
56. I'm a failure.
57. I get upset easily when I'm scolded.
58. I always know what to say to people.

COOPERSMITH INVENTORY    ADULT FORM

1. Things usually don't bother me.
2. I find it very hard to talk in front of a group.
3. There are lots of things about myself I'd change if I could.
4. I can make up my mind without too much trouble.
5. I'm a lot of fun to be with.
6. I get upset easily at home.
7. It takes me a long time to get used to anything new.
8. I'm popular with persons my own age.
9. My family usually considers my feelings.
10. I give in very easily.
11. My family expects too much of me.
12. It's pretty tough to be me.
13. Things are all mixed up in my life.
14. People usually follow my ideas.
15. I have a low opinion of myself.
16. There are many times when I would like to leave home.
17. I often feel upset with my work.
18. I'm not as nice looking as most people.
19. If I have something to say, I usually say it.
20. My family understands me.
21. Most people are better liked than I am.
22. I usually feel as if my family is pushing me.
23. I often get discouraged with what I am doing.
24. I often wish I were someone else.
25. I can't be depended on.

APPENDIX B

THE FAMILY RELATIONS TEST  
FORM FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN



## THE BENE ANTHONY FAMILY RELATIONS TEST

## The Test Items--Form for Young Children

(N..stands for the name by which the child is usually called.)

## Positive Feelings Coming from Child

- 00 N..thinks you are nice. Who is nice?
- 01 N..loves you. Whom does N..love?
- 02 N..likes to play in your bed. In whose bed does N..like to play?
- 03 N..likes to give you a kiss. Whom does N..like to kiss?
- 04 N..likes to sit on your lap. On whose lap does N..like to sit?
- 05 N..likes to be your little boy. Whose little boy is N..?
- 06 N..likes to play with you. Whom does N..like to play with?
- 07 N..likes to go for walks with you. Who should take N..for walks?

## Negative Feelings Coming from Child

- 10 N..thinks you are naughty. Who is naughty?
- 11 N..doesn't like you. Who is it that N..doesn't like?
- 12 N..thinks you are bad. Who is bad?
- 13 N..would like to spank you. Whom would N..like to spank?
- 14 N..wants you to go away. Whom would N..send away?
- 15 N..hates you. Who is it that N..hates?
- 16 N..thinks you are nasty. Who is nasty?
- 17 You make N..cross. Who makes N..cross?

## Positive Feelings Going Towards Child

- 20 You like to play with N.. Who likes to play with N..?
- 21 You like to kiss N.. Who likes to kiss N..?
- 22 You smile at N.. Who smiles at N..?
- 23 You make N..feel happy. Who makes N..feel happy?
- 24 You like to hug N.. Who likes to give N..a hug?
- 25 You love N.. Who loves N..?
- 26 You are nice to N.. Who is nice to N..?
- 27 You think N..is a nice little boy. Who thinks that N..is a nice little boy?

## Negative Feelings Going Towards Child

- 30 You smack N.. Who smacks N..?
- 31 You make N..sad. Who makes N..sad?
- 32 You scold N.. Who scolds N..?
- 33 You make N..cry. Who makes N..cry?
- 34 You get cross with N.. Who gets cross with N..?
- 35 You say N..is naughty. Who says N..is naughty?
- 36 You say N..is a bad boy. Who says N..is a bad boy?
- 37 You don't like N.. Who doesn't like N..?

APPENDIX C

THE FAMILY RATING SCALE

GLOSSARY OF VARIABLES--FAMILY RATING SCALE

### FAMILY RATING SCALE

SCORE                      1                      2                      3                      4                      5

#### A. FAMILY STRUCTURE

##### Leadership Style

|                                                                                                  |   |   |                                                               |   |                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---------------------------------------------------------------|---|----------------------------------------------|
| Leaderless.<br>Limited and/or erratic<br>leadership. Parental control<br>unsuccessful, rebuffed. | 1 | 2 | 3                                                             | 4 | 5                                            |
|                                                                                                  |   |   | Respectful negotiation.<br>"Cooperative" leadership<br>style. |   | Authoritarian. Parent<br>highly controlling. |

##### Parent-Child Coalitions

|                                                                                                                                                                                   |   |   |                                                                                                                    |   |                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Boundary between parental<br>subsystem and sibling<br>subsystem weak. Parent-child<br>coalition. Parental child.<br>Evidence of role reversal<br>(siblings parenting the parent). | 1 | 2 | 3                                                                                                                  | 4 | 5                                                             |
|                                                                                                                                                                                   |   |   | Clear boundary between<br>parental and sibling<br>subsystems. Could be<br>temporary parental child<br>when needed. |   | Rigid boundary between<br>parental and sibling<br>subsystems. |

Family Relationship Structure: Describe the relationships between family members using the following variables.

Clear boundary  
Diffuse boundary  
Rigid boundary  
Affiliation  
Overinvolvement

Conflict  
Coalition  
Detouring  
Parental child

#### B. FAMILY COHESION

##### Family Involvement

|                                                            |   |   |                                                                   |   |                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Very low involvement<br>or interaction<br>between members. | 1 | 2 | 3                                                                 | 4 | 5                                                                                |
|                                                            |   |   | Involvement is emphasized<br>but personal distance is<br>allowed. |   | Very high, symbiotic<br>involvement, members<br>very dependent on<br>each other. |

| SCORE                                                         | 1                                                                                                      | 2                                                                                                      | 3                                                                                      | 4 | 5          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|------------|
|                                                               | (Disengaged)                                                                                           |                                                                                                        | (Connected)                                                                            |   | (Enmeshed) |
| Emotional bonding                                             | Extreme emotional separateness.<br>Lack of family loyalty.                                             | Emotional closeness.<br>Loyalty to family is expected.                                                 | Extreme emotional closeness.<br>Loyalty to family is demanded.                         |   |            |
| Individual Boundaries                                         | Personal separateness predominant.<br>Rigid personal boundaries.                                       | Some personal separateness encouraged.<br>Clear personal boundaries.                                   | Lack of personal separateness.<br>Diffuse and weak personal boundaries.                |   |            |
| Time (physical and emotional)<br>Family Boundaries            | Time apart from family maximized. Rarely time together.<br>Open to influences from outside the family. | Time together important and scheduled. Time alone permitted.<br>Somewhat closed to outside influences. | Time together maximized. Little time alone permitted.<br>Closed to outside influences. |   |            |
| Friends                                                       | Individual friends seen alone.                                                                         | Individual friendships allowed and shared with the family.                                             | Family friends preferred with limited individual friends.                              |   |            |
| Interests and Recreation                                      | Disparate interests, separate recreation.                                                              | Separate interests and recreation but joint participation allowed.                                     | Joint interests and recreation mandated.                                               |   |            |
| Extended Family, Institutional and Community Interconnections | Non-caring.                                                                                            |                                                                                                        | Nurturant and supportive.                                                              |   |            |
| Community Involvement                                         | Social insularity and alienation.                                                                      |                                                                                                        | Integration and mutuality.                                                             |   |            |

SCORE                      1                      2                      3                      4                      5

C. FAMILY ADAPTABILITY

|                                    | (Rigid)                                                                     | (Flexible)                                                           | (Chaotic)                                                                     |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Discipline                         | Autocratic, "law and order."<br>Strict, rigid consequences.<br>Not lenient. | Usually democratic.<br>Negotiated consequences.<br>Somewhat lenient. | Laissez-faire and ineffective.<br>Inconsistent consequences.<br>Very lenient. |
| Roles                              | Limited repertoire;<br>strictly defined<br>roles.                           | Role sharing and making.<br>Fluid changes of roles.                  | Lack of role clarity.<br>Role shifts and role<br>reversals.                   |
| Rules                              | Unchanging rules.<br><br>Rules strictly<br>enforced.                        | Some rule changes.<br><br>Rules flexibly enforced.                   | Frequent rule changes.<br><br>Rules inconsistently<br>enforced.               |
| Negotiation and<br>Problem-Solving | Limited negotiations.<br>Decisions imposed<br>by parent.                    | Flexible negotiations.<br>Agreed upon decisions.                     | Endless negotiations.<br>Impulsive decisions.                                 |

D. FAMILY COMMUNICATION

|                       |                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                       |                                                            |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Clarity of Expression | Inconsistent and / or<br>unclear verbal messages.<br><br>Frequent incongruencies<br>between verbal and<br>non-verbal messages. | Some degree of clarity,<br>but non consistent across<br>time or across all members.<br><br>Some incongruent messages. | Very clear verbal<br>messages.<br><br>Generally congruent. |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|



SCORE                      1                      2                      3                      4                      5

|                                                                                                     |                                                                                                              |                                                                                     |                                                                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Freedom of Expression                                                                               | Infrequent discussion of self, feelings, and relationships.                                                  | Some discussion of self, feelings, and relationships.                               | Open discussion of self, feelings, and relationships.             |
| Invasiveness (the degree to which members speak for one another or make "mind reading" statements). | Many invasions.                                                                                              | Occasional invasions.                                                               | No evidence of invasions.                                         |
| Respect and Regard                                                                                  | Lack of respect for feelings or messages of other(s); possibly overtly disrespectful or belittling attitude. | Somewhat respectful of others but not consistent across time or across all members. | Consistently appears respectful of others' feelings and messages. |
| <u>E. FAMILY AFFECT</u>                                                                             |                                                                                                              |                                                                                     |                                                                   |
| Range of Feelings                                                                                   | Little or no expression of feelings.                                                                         | Obvious restrictions in the expression of some feelings.                            | Direct expression of a wide range of feelings.                    |
| Mood and Tone                                                                                       | Cynical, hopeless, and pessimistic.                                                                          | Overtly hostile.                                                                    | Usually warm, affectionate, humorous, and optimistic.             |
| Unresolvable Conflict                                                                               | Severe conflict, with severe impairment of group functioning.                                                | Definite conflict, with slight impairment of group functioning.                     | Little or no unresolvable conflict.                               |

## GLOSSARY OF VARIABLES--FAMILY RATING SCALE

### A. FAMILY STRUCTURE

- "...the invisible set of functional demands that organizes the ways in which family members interact." (Minuchin, 1974)
- can be characterized in terms of subsystems and boundaries.
- Subsystems are smaller units of the family through which the system differentiates and carries out its functions. Each individual is a subsystem, as are dyads such as mother-child. Larger sub-groupings are formed by task (parental subsystem), gender (grandmother, mother, daughter), and generation (sibling subsystem). Each member belongs to several subsystems simultaneously, and in each has different levels of power and learns differentiated skills.
- Boundaries are delineations between subsystems and between systems; the rules defining who participates, and how.

#### Variables

- leadership style: whom in the family typically assumes a leadership role, and how (erratic style to authoritarian style).
- parent-child coalitions: from weak to rigid boundary between parental and sibling subsystems
- family relationship structure
  - Clear boundary
  - Diffuse boundary
  - Rigid boundary
  - Affiliation
  - Overinvolvement
  - Conflict
  - Coalition--a process of joint action which is against a third person.
  - Detouring
  - Parental child
    - the situation in which a child assumes some or all of the responsibilities/ tasks typically assigned to a parent. This can be a temporary situation, as when an older child is left to care for younger siblings while a parent is out of the house, or a more permanent role reversal in which a child may become a care provider for their parent(s).

### B. FAMILY COHESION

- the degree to which family members are separated from or connected to their family. Can be thought of as the emotional bonding that family members have toward one another.
- variables assessed along a continuum whose extremes are disengaged and enmeshed.
- Disengaged refers to a transactional style in which members function autonomously but have a skewed sense of independence, lack feelings of loyalty and belonging, and lack the capacity for interdependence in terms of requesting support when needed. Other signs of disengagement include low emotional bonding of members, closed internal (individual) boundaries, time apart from the family is maximized, and friends, interests, and recreational activities are individual and outside the family.
- Enmeshed refers to a transactional style in which there is an extreme connectedness within the family. Members are typically over-concerned and over-involved in each other's lives. Enmeshment is indicated when emotional bonding and family involvement is high, external family boundaries are closed and internal, individual boundaries are blurred, "alone" time is minimized and most friends, interests, and recreational activities must be shared by the family as a whole. (Friesen, 1982)

#### Variables:

- degree of involvement in the family (low to high involvement/ interaction)
- degree of emotional bonding (separateness to closeness)
- individual boundaries (rigid to diffuse)

- physical and emotional time (time together minimized to maximized)
- family boundaries (degree to which the family is open or closed to outside influences)
- friends (mostly individual or family friends)
- interests and recreation (separate to joint)

### C. FAMILY ADAPTABILITY

- the extent to which the family system is flexible and able to change in response to situational and developmental stress.
- variables assessed along a continuum whose extremes are rigid to chaotic.

#### Variables:

- discipline (from autocratic to laissez-faire)
- roles (family)--the repetitive patterns of behavior by which individuals fulfill family functions. (Epstein, Bishop, and Levin, 1978)
- rules (family)--a metaphor used to identify a witnessed pattern of redundant action. All families function under a set of family rules which can be explicit or implicit, rigid or chaotic, many or few. (Friesen, 1982)
- negotiation and problem-solving

### D. FAMILY COMMUNICATION

- refers to nonverbal and verbal behavior within a social context, and those clues and symbols used by people in giving and receiving meaning. (Satir, 1967)

#### Variables:

- clarity of expression (from unclear, incongruent messages to very clear, congruent messages)

Congruent communication is one in which verbal and nonverbal messages match.

Incongruent communication is one in which the messages sent by the verbal and nonverbal channels are contradictory.

A clear, verbal message is a communication which is obvious and undisguised and aimed at the person for whom it is intended. (Friesen, 1982)

- the degree to which members discuss themselves, their feelings, and relationships (from infrequent to open discussion)
- degree of invasiveness between members (members speak for one another or make "mind reading" statements)
- respect and regard for the feelings and messages of other family members

### E. FAMILY AFFECT

- can be conceptualized as the feeling-tone of a family, or the typical affective state displayed by family members.

#### Variables:

- range of feelings expressed within the family
- mood and tone--the feeling-tone of the family's interaction (from cynical and pessimistic to affectionate and optimistic)
- the degree of seemingly unresolvable conflict (from severe conflict which impairs group functioning, to little or no unresolvable conflict)

**APPENDIX D**

**PERSONAL INTERVIEWS WITH MOTHER**

FIRST PERSONAL INTERVIEW WITH MOTHER

FAMILY #1: \_\_\_\_\_

## 1. Family Members

| i) | Name | Sex | Age | School | Grade |
|----|------|-----|-----|--------|-------|
|----|------|-----|-----|--------|-------|

Mother  
 Little Brother  
 Sibling 1  
 Sibling 2  
 Sibling 3  
 Sibling 4

- ii) Do you have any other children not living with you?  
 If yes, who do they live with? where?
- iii) Do you share your accommodation with anyone besides your children?  
 If yes, what is their relationship to you?

## 2. Family History

- i) Are you presently separated or divorced?  
 Approximate date of physical separation.  
 Approximate date of divorce.
- ii) Have you been previously married? If yes, number of times married.
- iii) In your most recent marriage, how many years did you live with your spouse?

## 3. Mothers' Education and Employment

- i) Level of formal education completed.
- ii) Are you currently employed?  
                     full-time                      unemployed  
                     part-time                      student  
                     other (explain)
- iii) If employed, what is your occupation?

## 4. Separation and Post-Separation

- i) How would you describe the "climate" of your separation (divorce)? (i.e., friendly, neutral, hostile)
- ii) How was this time for your children?
- iii) Were there changes your family made after the separation? (i.e., mom look for work, move to new house, neighbourhood or city, mom back to school, apply for social assistance)
- iv) Is life different for you since becoming a single parent? If yes, how?
- v) Has your relationship to your children been any different since you've been on your own?



## 5. Perception of Relationships

- i) How would you describe your present relationship with your children?
- ii) How would you describe your present relationship with your ex-spouse?
- iii) Children's contact with their father (at present)  

| Name of Child | Type of Contact | Frequency of Contact |
|---------------|-----------------|----------------------|
|               |                 |                      |
- iv) How would you describe your children's relationship with their father? With men in general?

## 6. Mothers' Support System

- i) Who, in your life, can you turn to for assistance and support?  

close friends  
 extended family  
 church  
 groups  
 other
- ii) Do you have family living in Edmonton? Have you had any contact with them in the last two months?

## 7. Little Brother's School Performance

- i) How is \_\_\_\_\_ presently doing in school?  
 Grades \_\_\_\_\_  
 Any behavior problems or teacher concerns? \_\_\_\_\_

## 8. Peer Relationships

- i) How does \_\_\_\_\_ get along with kids his own age?
- ii) Does he have any close or "best" friends?

## 9. Contact with Big Brother Agency

- i) Whose idea was it to contact the Big Brothers Agency? (i.e., self referral / agency referral or suggestion)
- ii) Reasons for contact \_\_\_\_\_
- iii) Any particular problems or concerns that you thought a Big Brother could help with? \_\_\_\_\_
- iv) What (if anything) are you hoping will happen with the involvement of a Big Brother? \_\_\_\_\_
- v) How do you feel about having a Big Brother involved in your family? \_\_\_\_\_

SECOND PERSONAL INTERVIEW WITH MOTHER

1. Have there been any major changes in your life since we last met?
  - in family membership (add or lose members)
  - employment status
  - financial situation
  - any other major life events
2. Could you describe the relationship your son has with his Big Brother, as you see it?
  - i) About how much time do they spend together each week?
  - ii) How do they arrange their get-togethers (i.e., who usually calls whom, suggests activities)?
  - iii) What type of activities do they typically do together?
3. In what ways has \_\_\_\_\_ relationship with his Big Brother influenced the relationship between you and your son?
4. In what ways has \_\_\_\_\_ relationship with his Big Brother influenced his relationship with siblings?
5. What has been their reaction to \_\_\_\_\_ having a Big Brother?
6. Childrens' contact with their father (at present).
 

| Name of child | Type of contact | Frequency of contact |
|---------------|-----------------|----------------------|
|---------------|-----------------|----------------------|
7. In what ways has \_\_\_\_\_ relationship with his Big Brother influenced his relationship with his father?
8. What feedback have you or your son had about how his father feels about \_\_\_\_\_ having a Big Brother?
9. In what ways has your son's involvement with his Big Brother influenced you as an individual, apart from your role as mother?
10. Has there been any change in the amount of time your son spends outside the home?
11. Has there been any change in the amount of time you spend outside the home?
12. Have you had any worries or concerns about your son's involvement with his Big Brother?
13. Do you think your son's attitude towards 'men in general' has changed in any way?
14. Peer Relationships
  - i) How does \_\_\_\_\_ get along with kids his own age? Any changes since we last met?
  - ii) Does he have any close or "best" friends?
  - iii) How does he present his Big Brother to his friends?

## 15. Little Brother's School Performance

- i) How is \_\_\_\_\_ presently doing in school? Any change since we last met?  
Grades  
Any behavior problems or teacher concerns?

16. How do you feel about about having a non-family adult male involved in your family?

17. Has the relationship between your son and his Big Brother met your hopes and expectations?

In what ways?

How is it different than you thought?

APPENDIX E

FAMILY INTERVIEWS

FIRST FAMILY INTERVIEW

1. Imagine that your family has unexpectedly won a small sum of money which you will spend on a vacation. In the next 15 minutes, I would like you to decide what you will do for that vacation.
2. Describe a typical week in the life of your family.
3. Tell me about the most enjoyable time you have had as a family.
4. Tell me about the most difficult time you have had as a family.
5. If you could change one thing about your family, what would that be?
6. What are you hoping will happen when (boy's name) has a Big Brother?
7. How do you feel about having a Big Brother involved in your family?



SECOND FAMILY INTERVIEW

1. Imagine that your family has somehow been granted three wishes--anything in the world you want could be yours. Talk amongst yourselves and decide what your family's three wishes would be.
2. Describe a typical week in the life of your family.
3. Your family is made up of \_\_\_\_\_ people; how have you managed to work together as a family?
4. If you could change one thing about your family, what would that be?
5. Is having a Big Brother what you hoped and expected it to be, or is it in some ways different? How?
6. What would you say are two advantages of having a big Brother?
7. What would you say are two disadvantages of having a Big Brother?

**APPENDIX F**

**CONSENT FORM**

CONSENT FORM

I, the undersigned, and my family, consent to participate in the research project designed to investigate the experiences of families involved with a Big Brother. This research will involve the use of questionnaires and family interviews, which will be audiotaped and/or videotaped for the use of the researcher only. This will be done twice--once, before the involvement of a Big Brother, and again, six or seven months later. The information obtained from this study will be used by Big Brothers of Edmonton and District to better understand the effects of the Big Brothers Program. I understand that the results of the study will be used for the researcher's Masters Thesis, University of Alberta. Families will in no way be identified to ensure confidentiality.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Deborah Kerr  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Mother)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)